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» the warrior code

[image]

{one} *All living cats are subjects underneath the realm of StarClan and must obey the laws laid out by their ancestors.*

{two} *Outside blood is impure and should be treated as such. No rogue, loner, or kittypet should be allowed to live on the territory of one of the four Clans. If they are found, they will be immediately dispatched.*

{three} *Warriors are the core of the Clan. They are required to defend their Clanmates with their life, and mustn't hesitate when it is time to go to battle.*

{four} *Every Clan should take two cats to share the title of deputy. When the current leader passes after the loss of their final life, the two deputies will fight to the death. The victor then claims the title of leader.*

{five} *Medicine cats should be held at a lower regard than any other cat in the Clan. They have chosen a life of cowardice over a life of glory, and should be punished for this decision.*

{six} *Seeking out a mate is encouraged; the pure blood of the Clan must go on.*

{seven} *Any kit born weak, disabled or that is of impure blood should be killed. If a cat has taken another of impure blood as their mate, they should be killed.*

» allegiances

[image] [image]

• leafclan •

leader

HAWKSTAR - MOTTLED GINGER TABBY TOM WITH WHITE MARKINGS, GREEN EYES AND BROAD SHOULDERS.
APPRENTICE - SNOWPAW

deputies

DUSKOWL - LONG-HAIRED, DARK RUSSET TABBY TOM WITH SHORT, MUSCULAR LEGS, BLACK MARKINGS, AND SHARP GREEN-AMBER EYES.
APPRENTICE - STORMPAW

RAVENSPLASH - LITHE, DARK GRAY TABBY SHE-CAT WITH PALE AMBER EYES.

warriors

FROSTLION - ENORMOUS GINGER TOM WITH DARK BROWN FACIAL MARKINGS AND FOREPAWS WITH SOFT BLUE EYES.
APPRENTICE - FALCONPAW

ICEDUST - BEAUTIFUL SILVER TABBY SHE-CAT WITH DARK GRAY PAWS AND BLUE-GREEN EYES.
APPRENTICE - WHITEPAW

PINESHADE - CHOCOLATE BROWN TOM WITH LONG WHISKERS AND GREEN EYES.

EMBERMIST - GINGER MARBLE TABBY SHE-CAT WITH LONG LEGS AND FIREY ORANGE EYES.
APPRENTICE - BIRDPAW

BERRYTHORN - THIN TORTOISESHELL SHE-CAT WITH SMALL PAWS, A PINK NOSE AND AMBER EYES.

FALLENMOON - SHORT-HAIRED, ENTIRELY BLACK TOM WITH INTENSE YELLOW EYES.
APPRENTICE - DAWNPAW

REDWIND - REDISH BROWN TABBY TOM WITH WHITE MARKINGS AND OLIVE GREEN EYES.

BRINDLEWING - MOTTLED SHE-CAT WITH WHITE, BROWN AND BLACK MARKINGS AND SOFT, ICE BLUE EYES.

CINDERSHADOW - GRAY SHE-CAT WITH A FEW LIGHT BROWN MOTTLED PATCHES AND GREEN EYES.

NETTLESAND - SMALL, SANDY GINGER TOM WITH SOME TABBY MARKINGS AND VERY BRIGHT BLUE EYES.

apprentices

WHITEPAW - ALL WHITE SHE-CAT WITH DEEP BLUE EYES.

SNOWPAW - ALL WHITE, SHORT-HAIRED TOM WITH ONE BLUE EYE AND ONE GREEN EYE.

BIRDPAW - CALICO SHE-CAT WITH A SOMEWHAT FLUFFY TAIL AND HAZEL EYES.

STORMPAW - GRAY AND WHITE TOM WITH GREEN EYES WITH FLECKS OF HAZEL IN THEM.

FALCONPAW - GRAY TABBY TOM WITH EXTREMELY ORANGE EYES.

DAWNPAW - GRAY SHE-CAT WITH LIGHTER GRAY MARKINGS AND DARK BROWN EYES.

queens & kits

SUNFEATHER - CREAM TABBY SHE-CAT WITH A ROUND FACIAL

STRUCTURE AND HAZEL EYES.
KITS - BRACKENKIT, HAZELKIT, THISTLEKIT

DOVERAIN - WHITE SHE-CAT WITH MOTTLED PATCHES AND BLUE EYES.
KITS - EXPECTING

elders

NIGHTWATER - BLACK SHE-CAT WITH PERCEPTIVE DARK BROWN EYES.

medicine cat

OAKFLAME - LONG-LEGGED, RUSSET BROWN TOM WITH COPPER EYES.
APPRENTICE - ALDERPAW

medicine cat apprentice

ALDERPAW - DARK BENGAL TOM WITH LIGHT, FOCUSED GREEN EYES.

- - -

• iceclan •

leader

PEBBLESTAR - A SOFT GRAY-SILVER TABBY TOM WITH WHITE PAWS, A WHITE UNDERBELLY, AND BLUE-GRAY EYES.

deputies

PALEFOX - CREAM AND GINGER TOM WITH DARKER GINGER MARKINGS AND BRIGHT HAZEL EYES.

EBONYSTRIDE - SMOKE TABBY TOM WITH RICH, BURNT AMBER EYES.

warriors

DARKIVY - VERY DARK BROWN TABBY SHE-CAT WITH INTELLIGENT

HAZEL EYES.
APPRENTICE - MISTPAW

CEDARPATCH - A WHITE TOM CAT WITH BROWN TABBY PATCHES AND OLIVE GREEN EYES.

FLINTCREEK - AN ASHEN GRAY SHE-CAT WITH TABBY SPOTTING AND LIGHT GREEN EYES.

EAGLECLOUD - AN AMBER-BROWN TOM WITH A WHITE MUZZLE AND CHEST AND SOIL GREEN EYES.

apprentices

MISTPAW - FLUFFY, SIAMESE SHE-CAT WITH STUNNING BLUE EYES.

medicine cat

GINGERSWAN - AN ENORMOUS GINGER AND WHITE TOM WITH THICK, LONG FUR AND OLIVE GREEN EYES.

- - -

• splashclan •

leader

RUSHSTAR - A LANKY, BROWN TABBY TOM WITH MISMATCHED BROWN EYES.

- - -

• breezeclan •

leader

MINTSTAR - BROWN, LEOPARD SPOTTED SHE-CAT WITH GREEN, AMBER-FLECKED EYES.

- - -

territory

» prologue

[image]

A flash of lightning pierced the sky, raking the gloomy clouds that hung overhead like icy, hard-driven clawmarks. There was a clap of thunder, and suddenly rain began to pour from the sky, hammering the ground with astounding force. A mingled streak of orange, white and brown interrupted the grayness that hung in the forest and fled over a small hill.

Several moments passed, and suddenly a figure materialized a few lengths behind where the other had vanished. Another flash of lightning outlined the large ears and wiry frame of a cat. The cat scented the air, her ears rotating slightly. In a second she had whipped around, "They're headed for the border! Drive them out!" she snarled, and a surge of cats erupted from the bushes in front of her.

"Wait," a broad shouldered tom stepped forward, "Many of our cats are injured, we should send them back to camp."

"But then we'll be outnumbered!" the she-cat growled, her amber eyes flashing with anger.

The tom flicked his long tail in disdain, "Ravensplash, some of our warriors are in no condition to run, let alone fight," ignoring a scornful glare from the she-cat, he turned to another cat, whose shoulder was slashed with crimson blood, "Frostlion, take the injured back to camp."

Frostlion, who seemed unfazed by the blood dripping down his ginger shoulder, nodded calmly and turned to pad away.

Ravensplash lashed her gray tabby tail, watching as four cats left with Frostlion. "We'll have no hope of driving them away now," she muttered.

The broad-shouldered tom turned to her, "For StarClan's sake,

stop whining."

He flicked an ear, and the patrol of cats set out again. Together, they charged over the hill, following the scent trail left by the fleeing cats. It wasn't long before the intruders could be seen up ahead, resting briefly under the crest of another hill.

From where Ravensplash was, she could see that many of them were bleeding. She narrowed her eyes, *easy prey!*

In an instant they were upon them, battle cries splitting the air. Ravensplash felt the rain battering her fur as she raced across the open field and hurled herself at a small ginger tom. The warrior yowled in defiance as Ravensplash tried to drive her claws into his flank, missing as he dodged to the side. The tom shot forward, claws unsheathed and teeth bared in a furious snarl. Unprepared, Ravensplash was knocked off her paws and slammed hard into the soaking wet grass beneath her.

The ginger tom twisted around to launch another attack, but Ravensplash recovered quickly, scrambling back onto her feet. With her eyes narrowed to slits, she let out a low, menancing growl, "BreezeClan is not welcome here."

Her contender parted his jaws to bite back a sharp reply, but the call to retreat suddenly resonated through the air. He looked at Ravensplash with hatred in his eyes, then flattened his ears to his head and ran to join his Clanmates as they raced away from the battlegrounds.

Yowls of victory rose around her, and Ravensplash watched with content as the BreezeClan intruders crossed the wide Thunderpath that marked the border of their territory.

A boom of thunder shook the ground, and Ravensplash rejoined her Clanmates. The broad-shouldered tom picked his way to the center of the crowd, "Another victory for LeafClan," he meowed proudly.

Ravensplash's pelt prickled with dislike, and she shouldered her way through the sea of cats to join him in the center. "Let's go home," she addressed her Clan, before adding more quietly to the

tom, "Duskowl, we'll need to tell Hawkstar right away. He won't be happy to know that BreezeClan has overstepped the boundary."

But Duskowl didn't seem to be listening. He turned his massive body to lead the patrol back in the direction they had come, his large shoulder blades shifting as he walked.

"Toad-brain," Ravensplash muttered, watching as he pattered off, "I'll be happy to be the one who slits your throat."

// a.n.
hi everyone! thanks for reading, and i hope you enjoyed. please leave a vote and a comment telling me how it was. ;)

» one

[image]

"Your brother was telling me about the BreezeClan patrol you encountered several dawns ago," Nightwater looked at Ravensplash with her dark brown eyes, her ears twitching as an apprentice tended to her ticks. She winced as he prodded her flank with his paw, then bent in and used his teeth to pull a tiny, wriggling body from her side.

Ravensplash shrugged, "We drove them off easily."

Nightwater chuckled hoarsely, "Still, it's hardly like BreezeClan to trespass. They tend to stay on their own land and-- Stormpaw, quit pulling my fur out."

The apprentice ducked his head embarassedly, then continued his task more gently.

"They're more respectful of the boundaries than IceClan," Ravensplash agreed, eyeing the gray apprentice as he went on working, "But I'm not sure why you're surprised. They aren't going to go seasons without setting a paw on another Clan's ground."

Her mother gave a sigh, "I suppose you're right," she shook with gentle laughter, "You always are."

Ravensplash flicked her tail and stood to leave.

Suddenly, the light filtering in through the entrance to the elder's den was blocked by a large figure, and Duskowl appeared. "Ravensplash," he meowed firmly, "It's time to organize the hunting patrols."

The dark tabby she-cat nodded, "Very well."

Stormpaw's ears perked up and he bounded over to meet Duskowl, who was his mentor. "Can I come on one?" he asked

brightly, swaying on his paws.

Duskowl narrowed his eyes, "Not until you finish your chores."

His apprentice's tail drooped as he made his way back to Nightwater's side. The elder blinked at him as he sat back down. "There was a tick on my left foreleg earlier this morning," the old she-cat told him, "See if you can pluck it off, will you?"

Stormpaw inspected the elder's foreleg.

"Your other left," Nightwater mewed, unamused.

Ravensplash swallowed her laughter as she left the den with Duskowl.

The camp was swathed in warm, greenleaf sunlight, and Ravensplash found herself squinting into the open clearing. Duskowl tapped her shoulder with the tip of his tail and led her to the far edge of camp, where a group of warriors stood waiting. Ravensplash dipped her head to them as she padded alongside the other deputy.

"I'll be taking a patrol to the BreezeClan border and back," Duskowl informed the group as he sat down in front of them, "That way we can hunt along the way and check to see if any more cats have slithered their way into our territory," he said the last few words through bared teeth and they came out as a low pitched growl.

Fighting the urge to roll her eyes at his dramatic showing, Ravensplash stepped in front of Duskowl and addressed the warriors, "And another patrol will head in the direction of the mountains," she instructed, a sheen of dominance in her amber eyes, "Don't go as far as the IceClan border, but be sure to pick up some prey before you return. Icedust," her eyes flickered to the senior warrior, "You lead the patrol. Take Redwind and Berrythorn along with you."

The silver tabby she-cat gave a respectful nod.

As the two patrols prepared to leave, Ravensplash felt a tail swish across her flank, and she turned to see Duskowl staring at her, "What's going on?" he purred in amusement, "Too tired to leave camp today?"

Ravensplash's pelt prickled, "No," she assured him, "I'm coming with you."

Duskowl cocked an eyebrow, but said nothing.

She frowned, "Oh, don't look so content. I'm only tagging along because I don't think it's fair for you to claim the patrol to the BreezeClan border. I'd like some action too."

"I didn't say anything. If you think I care that you're coming, you're wrong."

The tom turned to lead his patrol out of camp through the bramble tunnel, and Ravensplash felt heat rising underneath her skin. *What a fox-faced mouse-brain.*

Ravensplash pushed her frustration to the back of her mind and skittered after the patrol. Her nose flooded with the scents of the forest. Drops of rainwater clung to the grass underneath her paws, and they shook as the patrol thundered past. She quickly forgot her anger in the midst of the wild.

Nettlesand, a young warrior who was also on the patrol, bounded up to her side and gave her a friendly nudge, "Hey Ravensplash, what's up?"

The she-cat looked at him with surprise; new warriors barely *ever* spoke to the deputies. It was considered disrespectful.

"Oh," the sandy ginger tom averted his eyes sheepishly, realizing his mistake, "Sorry."

"No," Ravensplash flicked his back with her long tail, "It's actually refreshing to speak to someone other than Duskowl for a change."

Nettlesand's blue eyes glimmered with thanks, "You two seem

awfully close."

This made Ravensplash fall silent for a moment. No cat had ever described her relationship with the powerful tom in that way. "Really?" she asked finally, "He drives me crazy."

Leaping over a large root, Nettlesand laughed, "That much is obvious. But I always figured you two were good friends, even if it is difficult to tolerate eachother at times."

"He is definitely *not* my friend," Ravensplash muttered.

"Well, it won't be too long before you'll be rid of him."

Ravensplash was shocked at the darkness in the small tom's words, but she could sense a joking tone in his voice. Regardless of whether or not he was joking, Ravensplash knew, there was truth to what he said. According to tradition, after the leader lost his or her last life, the two deputies would fight to the death to determine the next Clan leader. She swallowed. It was common knowledge among the Clan that Hawkstar, their leader, had already lost several lives, despite being so young.

Before she could reply, the patrol skidded to a halt, and Duskowl gave the command to spread out and hunt. Thankful to get away from the prying conversation, Ravensplash broke away from Nettlesand and began searching for prey.

It was easy to scent a mouse not too far away. After all, the forest crawled with all sorts of prey during greenleaf. Ravensplash dropped to the ground and shuffled forward, locating the tiny creature scrabbling amongst some tree roots. When she crouched only a fox-length away, Ravensplash exploaded off of her haunches and pounced neatly onto her victim, dispatching it with one swift bite to the neck.

She carried her kill by the tail back to where the patrol had spread out. Nettlesand had returned as well, a plump robin dangling in his jaws.

"Good catch!" he praised her, setting his bird onto the grass.

Pineshade, Embermist, and Duskowl all came padding back, one by one, proudly carrying their kills. Ravensplash felt hunger roll in her belly at the sight of so much fresh kill. *I can eat when I get back.* She reminded herself.

"Bury your prey," Duskowl ordered, "We'll retrieve it on the way back."

As Ravensplash used her claws to scrape earth over the mouse, she felt a gaze burning into the back of her head. She turned to see Pineshade staring at her with something unrecognizable present in his green eyes.

The she-cat looked away uncomfortably. *What does* he *want?*

Luckily, she didn't have time to dwell on it. Duskowl called for the patrol to get moving again, and she felt her legs naturally fall into the rhythm of running. Nettlesand returned to her side, but didn't say anything. She breathed a sigh of relief, thankful for the silence.

The forest moved by in a green blur and Ravensplash forgot where she was. She barely registered crossing the stream that ran across LeafClan territory, a little ways from the BreezeClan border. And when at last they had reached the plains that stretched into the Thunderpath, Nettlesand had to stop her from running straight onto its hot surface.

"T-thanks," she stuttered, her fur standing on end.

"Careful, Ravensplash," Nettlesand warned playfully, "A monster could've flattened you to bits!"

"That doesn't even make sen--"

Suddenly, a loud yowl split the air and Ravensplash was knocked off her paws.

// a.n.
i love nettlesand so freaking much omg. also leave a vote and a comment if you liked this chapter! i hope it wasn't too slow

paced. things will pick up soon, i promise.

» two

[image]

*Ravensplash saw blinding flashes of colo*r as she tumbled to the ground, her amber eyes wide with alarm. A sharp pain blossomed in her side as it made contact with the sharp ridges of several rocks that stuck out of the grass. She looked to see a thin, long-legged black and white tom standing over her, his teeth bared.

Her heart quickened as suddenly Nettlesand came charging in to headbutt her assailant. The black and white tom hissed in surprise as he went skidding backwards. Seeing her opportunity, Ravensplash leapt to her paws.

A little ways away, Duskowl had a she-cat pinned tightly to the ground, while Pineshade and Embermist worked to fend off two vicious attackers. Ravensplash curled her lip in disgust as the vile taste of BreezeClan wafted into her nostrials and onto her tongue. "What are you doing on LeafClan territory?" she demanded, advancing on the black and white tom.

"This is BreezeClan territory," the tom sneered, flexing his long claws.

Ravensplash lashed her tail, "You know very well that the Thunderpath divides our territories," she motioned with her muzzle to the hard, gray surface just a fox-length away.

Sorrow slipped into the tom's green eyes, "We are tired," he rasped, "Our territory has always been overrun with Twolegs and their things, and we're only a little ways from Twolegplace."

The LeafClan deputy narrowed her eyes, noting how thin this cat was. His ribs protruded from under his skin, his head was knobby and his legs looked frail and bony. She felt pity edge its way into her gut, but she forced it away with the ice in her heart.

"We are hungry," the tom pleaded. His muscles had relaxed and he

had retracted his claws. He no longer looked as though he wanted to fight.

Nettlesand glanced at Ravensplash expectantly.

Ravensplash shot her Clanmate an icy glare, "Leave," she growled, turning back to the BreezeClan warrior, "You're not welcome here. If your Clan is starving, find other means to help them. You are no concern of ours."

The tom winced at her words, and his tail drooped in defeat. Ravensplash turned to see Duskowl drive the BreezeClan she-cat across the Thunderpath, followed by the other two warriors Pineshade and Embermist had fought. Ravensplash cocked an eyebrow, turning back and eyeing the black and white tom.

Understanding, he sighed and padded sadly across the Thunderpath.

Duskowl called for the patrol to reassemble, "Well done, everybody," he praised them when they had all circled around him.

"What in StarClan's name do they want?" Embermist wondered out loud, aggression burning in her distinct orange eyes.

"They're starving," Ravensplash informed her, stepping forward, "The black and white tom told me they're looking to take our territory. Apparently theirs isn't good enough for them."

Duskowl shook out his dark pelt, "Well, their hunger has made them reckless. We outnumbered them, and yet they chose to attack regardless."

Twitching his ears, Nettlesand shrugged, "Maybe most of their warriors are too weak to fight," he suggested, and Ravensplash thought she detected a note of pity in the young tom's voice. She felt a flare of anger in her chest.

"Perhaps," Duskowl agreed dryly.

Nettlesand shuffled his paws, "Shouldn't we help them?" he ventured, uncertainty present in his clear blue eyes.

Before Duskowl could reply, Ravensplash reared on the tom, "Nettlesand!" she scolded fiercely, "You should know better. You're a LeafClan warrior, and this is our territory. StarClan made it that way, which means that *we* hunt in its grasses, *we* climb its trees, and *we* swim in its rivers."

Recoiling, the tom nodded swiftly.

"Good," Ravensplash turned to stalk away, and she noticed with surprise that a glimmer of pride hung in Duskowl's eyes.

» - - - «

When at last the patrol returned to camp through the bramble tunnel, Ravensplash went to deposit her mouse on the fresh-kill pile. Her mouth watered as the delicious scents of prey floated into her nose, and she picked out a plump sparrow to eat.

Maybe Nettlesand wants to share.

But the ginger warrior avoided her eyes as he placed his own kill onto the pile and headed straight for the warriors' den. Ravensplash tried her best to suppress the disappointment that sunk in her stomach.

Shaking it off, she carried the sparrow a few paces towards Duskowl and set it down. The tabby tom eyed her suspiciously and she did her best to look friendly, "Hey, Duskowl, want to share with m--?"

"Hawkstar!" Duskowl's eyes focused on something behind Ravensplash and he trotted past her, his fur brushing hers as he went.

Ravensplash felt her ears flatten to her head. She sighed, scooping the sparrow back into her jaws. The dark gray tabby turned and carried it towards the edge of camp, watching Duskowl out of the corner of her eye as he conversed excitedly with Hawkstar. *He really is a fox-heart.*

The she-cat dropped her bird near the camp wall and settled down to eat. But the flesh tasted sour in her mouth, and she couldn't stop thinking about how she was alone. She kept her head down,

cleaning her whiskers of bits of meat when at last she had finished eating. Her eyelids drooped, and she set her head down on her paws.

A blurry black figure appeared above her, and she lifted her muzzle to see her brother, Fallenmoon, standing there.

"You alright?" he asked kindly, his long tail twitching back and forth.

Ravensplash shrugged, and Fallenmoon lay down beside her.

"We've all been there," he assured her, nuzzling her lightly with his head, "Sometimes the hardest days are the ones where you don't feel anything."

At this, Ravensplash blinked. She was consistently surprised by how easily Fallenmoon understood her.

Fallenmoon parted his jaws in an enormous yawn and closed his yellow eyes. Ravensplash smiled and watched as the lean black tom drifted into a peaceful sleep. As she observed him, she felt a humidity arise in the air around her, and soon it began to rain. The drops fell one at a time; not as powerfully as they had in the storm a few days previous. Each drop was small and clear, falling with a delicate *plink* and then sliding off the grass and into the soil to nourish the flowers and plants. Ravensplash sighed with content and watched the sunlight dim behind dark stormclouds.

I am a deputy. I will be leader. I don't need any cat other than myself. I will keep working until one day, I am the most powerful cat in the forest.

With these thoughts drifting gently in her mind, Ravensplash began to fall asleep. But just as she started to slip into unconciousness, a hostile snarl startled her back to reality.

"What are you doing in LeafClan camp?"

Ravensplash lifted her head at the voice of Brindlewing; a young, mottled white she-cat with brown and black patches. The warrior stood at the entrance to camp, the fur on her spine raised. Ravensplash noticed two warriors she had never seen before

emerging from the tunnel, and when she tasted the air, she could smell the scent of IceClan riding on the fresh rain.

Narrowing her eyes to slits, the deputy rose and stalked over. Brindlewing stepped aside to let her pass, but stayed nearby in case there was trouble.

The IceClan warriors dipped their heads politely to Ravensplash as they halted in front of her.

"We'd like to speak to Hawkstar."

// a.n.
leave a vote and a comment for quick updates! please tell me how this chapter was and who your favorite character is so far. there's also now a map under the 'allegiances' page that shows the territory, so be sure to check that out if you're confused. ;)

» three

[image]

"Why?" Brindlewing took a pawstep forward, her hackles raised as she eyed the two foreign warriors.

One of the IceClan cats closed the distance between herself and Brindlewing, "We'd like to speak to Hawkstar," she repeated. Her eyes were narrowed, but Ravensplash saw that there was no aggression in her hazel gaze.

"It's okay," Ravensplash murmured, laying her tail gently on Brindlewing's back. She admired the eager young she-cat for her caution, but something told her these cats were not here to start trouble. She rotated her head so that she made eye contact with the she-cat, "Follow me."

The she-cat flicked a dark tabby ear, "Thank you," she dipped her head and followed as Ravensplash padded in the direction of Hawkstar's den.

Ravensplash led the two warriors through the large clearing to the deep rock cleft that served as the leader's den. She noticed that the other visitor, a white tom with brown tabby patches, seemed uncomfortable as he walked briskly after her. The she-cat, however, was calm, keeping her large hazel eyes fixated on what lay ahead of her. Ravensplash marveled at her composure in such an unfamiliar environment.

At last they reached the leader's den, and Ravensplash instructed for the two cats to wait under a nearby, broad-leafed tree. Ducking her head, she slipped through the crevice in the rock face and into a roomy, shady den. The smooth rock floor felt cool against her paws and a few drops of rain cascaded down from a small gap in the ceiling. "Hawkstar?" she called, her voice resonating throughout the cavern.

An orange shape stirred towards the back of the den, "Yes?"

Hawkstar shifted so that he was facing the deputy, his green eyes curious.

"There are two IceClan cats here," she informed him, sitting down and curling her tail around her forepaws, "They've requested to see you."

Hawkstar got to his paws, mumbled an aggravated, "Of course they have," and then stalked past Ravensplash and out of the den.

Ravensplash followed close behind and flattened her ears as rain drizzled down from the sky. Spotting her leader underneath the tree with the two IceClan warriors, she hurried over to join them.

"My name is Darkivy," the she-cat meowed respectfully, "This is Cedarpatch," she gestured to the tom, "We've both come from IceClan to ask something of you."

The amber tabby leader raised an eyebrow, "Well?"

Darkivy glanced at Cedarpatch briefly, but the tom looked away. She sighed, closing her hazel eyes, "IceClan would like to ask for LeafClan's help in fighting the war against SplashClan."

Hawkstar flicked an ear, "What war?"

"As you know, IceClan used to be a part of SplashClan. However, we revolted and broke away, establishing our own Clan in our own territory. That was many seasons ago. But now, SplashClan is trying to force us back into reuniting with them," Darkivy dug her claws into the soggy grass as she spoke.

Ravensplash stared at the she-cat with surprise; every cat knew that IceClan and SplashClan used to be one and the same, but she'd never imagined SplashClan would try to reunite the sister Clans so long after the original dispute had taken place. She glanced over at Hawkstar, who sat with his tail resting plainly on the ground.

After a short pause, he spoke, "I understand that IceClan values their freedom and independence from SplashClan. However,

these matters have nothing to do with me or my warriors."

Desperation flashed in Darkivy's hazel eyes, "Please!" she begged, jumping to her paws, "You must help us, or IceClan will be swallowed back into a system that we've been fighting for so long!"

Her leader began to protest, but Ravensplash quickly nudged him to the side with her shoulder, "Hawkstar," she whispered, "This is a perfect opportunity to make a powerful ally. If we help IceClan now, they may be willing to help us in the future."

The muscular tom groaned, "Ravensplash, it'll be a thankless task. We'll help them once and they'll never repay the favor."

She shook her head, "No, IceClan is honorable. They wouldn't do that."

Hawkstar gave a heavy sigh, "Fine," he muttered. Turning back to the IceClan warriors, he nodded curtly, "We'll help you. But we expect IceClan to remember the time where LeafClan gave them assistance when they needed it most."

"Say no more," Darkivy assured him with a smile, "Your favor will not be forgotten."

"Good," Ravensplash purred briskly, "I'll escort you out of camp."

Determined not to give Hawkstar a chance to change his mind, she trotted to the bramble tunnel, Darkivy and Cedarpatch in tow. As they walked underneath the bent, thorny bushes, Ravensplash couldn't prevent a small smile from spreading across her face. *With IceClan at our side, we'll be unstoppable.*

Cedarpatch bounded out in front, looking much less nervous as when he'd first entered the camp. "Thank you!" he thanked Ravensplash cheerily.

She dipped her head, "Of course. If you have any trouble, you know where to find us."

"Great," Darkivy mewed, padding after her Clanmate, "We'll

see you later then."

Ravensplash watched as the two cats grew smaller and smaller until they were swallowed up by the greenery of the forest. Her eyes kept flickering to Darkivy, but she didn't know why. Shrugging, she turned and raced back into camp.

The dark gray tabby's paws flew underneath her, hitting the spongy soil with every stride.

"Ooomf!"

Ravensplash looked up to see Duskowl glaring down at her. "Sorry," she said sheepishly, her head throbbing from where she'd run into him.

"What did those IceClan cats want?" he questioned, ignoring her pathetic apology.

"Oh, erm, they wanted LeafClan's help in fighting SplashClan. Apparently those flippered fish-brains are trying to force IceClan into reuniting."

Duskowl laughed, "That's ridiculous, why would LeafClan be bothered to help with such a thing?"

Ravensplash's cheeks burned, "It's not ridiculous!" she countered, "Besides, I convinced Hawkstar to agree to their request."

The dark tabby deputy's fur rose, "What?"

"That's right. I'm a diplomat!" she puffed out her chest fur proudly.

Duskowl growled, "Ugh, I swear. The only reason Hawkstar listens to you is because he's got a soft spot for you," he looked her up and down, scrutiny burning in his sharp green stare, "Can't see why." Without another word, Duskowl shouldered past her and through the bramble tunnel.

Ravensplash blinked, "What?" she called, turning her head. But Duskowl had gone.

The deputy stood still for a moment, then slowly pattered towards the center of camp. *The only reason Hawkstar listens to you is because he's got a soft spot for you.* What had Duskowl meant by those words? Her eyes flitted automatically to the nursery, where she could see Doverain just inside. The white queen was Hawkstar's mate, and was heavy with his kits. Ravensplash's mind whirled. Surely Duskowl hadn't thought that Hawkstar was interested in her *romantically?*

A ginger blur appeared in front of Ravensplash, and she looked up to see Nettlesand. The sight of the small tom shook her from her thoughts.

"Hey, Ravensplash," Nettlesand was looking at her with a guarded expression, almost like he was afraid of being snapped at, "Would you like to go hunting?"

Relief flooded through Ravensplash's body, "Sure," she nodded, happy that the tom was talking to her again.

Nettlesand's blue eyes shone with gratitude, "Great!"

As the two cats headed for the bramble tunnel, Ravensplash felt a calm envelop her. The rain began to taper off, and she let herself be absorbed by the quieting forest.

// a.n.
okay, a lot of the ground work has finally been layed. shit is about to go DOWN in the next chapter! keep watch for that, and thanks for reading. leave a vote and a comment. ;)

» four

[image]

There were bodies everywhere, rushing about in complete chaos. Ravensplash and Nettlesand stood at the opening of the bramble tunnel, stunned. The dark-colored deputy dropped the bounty of fresh-kill she carried in her jaws. "What's going on, Dawnpaw?" she asked urgently, stopping a small gray apprentice in her tracks.

"Doverain is having her kits and we can't find Oakflame anywhere," the young she-cat's voice was frantic.

Ravensplash lashed her tail, "What?! Why isn't he in camp?"

Shrinking away at Ravensplash's unexpected anger, Dawnpaw lowered her gaze, "I-I don't know," she stuttered, "Redwind was saying that maybe he went out to collect herbs..."

"What about Alderpaw?" Ravensplash inquired, forcing her tone to remain calm.

Dawnpaw cast a worried glance in the direction of the nursery, "He's in there, but he says he's never delivered kits before, and Doverain is losing a lot of blood," the apprentice looked into Ravensplash's eyes with horror on her face, "You should've seen it. There was red *everywhere*."

Ravensplash was about to head for the nursery when she heard a furious snarl from behind her.

"There you are!" it was Hawkstar, and Oakflame stood at the entrance to camp, looking bewildered as he held a bundle of herbs clenched between his teeth, "Get your sorry tail into the nursery and do your job!" The leader snapped his jaws so close to Oakflame's neck that Ravensplash thought for a split second that he had actually bitten him, but Oakflame rushed away without a sound.

Hawkstar stood still for a few heartbeats, fuming. Then he sighed, acknowledged Ravensplash's presence with a flick of his orange tabby tail and went to wait outside the nursery.

"That was awful," Nettlesand breathed from beside Ravensplash, "Can you believe he treats his own brother like that?"

Ravensplash looked at her friend with surprise, "Oakflame is a medicine cat," she mewed simply.

Nettlesand stared at her with wide blue eyes, "So?"

"So by what's written in the warrior code, he's a lesser cat," she huffed with amusement and cuffed the small warrior lightly on the ear, "Honestly, Nettlesand, if you paid any attention at all you'd know these things."

The ginger tom ignored her playful banter and was silent for a long time, his eyes clouded and fixed on the nursery. He dropped his head, "I don't understand why just be--"

A pain laced yowl split the air, interrupting Nettlesand before he could finish his thought.

Ravensplash tensed and looked with worried amber eyes to where Hawkstar stood outside the nursery entrance, "She must be in a lot of pain," she wondered aloud.

Nettlesand said nothing.

Suddenly Oakflame appeared from inside the nursery and beckoned Hawkstar with his tail. The leader moved his enormous body so that he stood on his paws and padded carefully inside, looking somewhat hesitant.

"I'm going to go with him," Ravensplash told Nettlesand gently, "Can you bring our prey to the fresh-kill pile?"

Her friend didn't look like he had heard her, but he gave an absent nod.

The deputy wandered into the nursery, rustling the lichen that hung

over the entrance as she stepped inside. Towards the back of the sturdy, bramble and fern constructed den lay Doverain, her sides heaving. Hawkstar sat to her left, his head bent down and his eyes narrowed in delicate concentration.

Ravensplash approached with caution, suddenly feeling as though she was intruding. "Hawkstar," she murmured when she was a tail-length away. He made no movement, just continued to stare with focus on the wet shapes nestled in the moss beneath him. When he continued to ignore her, Ravensplash gently touched him with an outstretched paw.

His entire being shuddered, and a horrible sound escaped his lips. Then, he whirled around and stumbled blindly out of the den, the ground vibrating as his enormous paws brought him clumsily away.

"Wha--?" Ravensplash turned her head quickly to Doverain, but her words became stuck in her throat when she saw what lay at the queens belly. A litter of three kits, two toms and a single she-kit. They were all very pink, and Alderpaw sat nearby, licking each one in turn to keep them warm.

The first two kits were beautiful. The eldest tom and the little she-kit. They were mewling preciously as they searched blindly for somewhere to suckle.

But the littlest tom was different.

Ravensplash watched as he shifted on his stomach, revealing a very small stump in the place where his right foreleg should've been. Her heart dropped, hardening into a jagged stone that sat at the bottom of her chest and tore at her skin. *He's impure.*

"I hate him," Doverain's eyes had opened, and they were sharp with anger. The white queen looked blankly at the tom, her expression so devoid of emotion that Ravensplash had to look away.

The gray tabby she-cat blinked, unsure of what to say, how to comfort this grieving mother. She looked to Alderpaw, who was shivering uncontrollably.

Ravensplash stood and stalked out.

» - - - «

Ravensplash watched with fascination as Hawkstar carried his tiny kit into the center of camp. She was next to the warriors' den, sharing a plump brown bird with Nettlesand. The expression on her leader's face was unreadable as he halted and set the tom onto the sandy ground. His sister, Embermist, was beside him while their other sibling, Oakflame, sat motionless at the edge of the medicine den.

"It's time," Hawkstar boomed, and all eyes turned to focus on his ginger shape. Embermist nodded to her brother and padded away.

Nettlesand stiffened and his fur rose with unease.

The entire Clan gathered closer to their leader, forming a circle as they whispered amongst themselves. Ravensplash stood and started over to join them, but felt something catch her tail and pin it to the ground behind her. She turned to see Nettlesand holding her tail to the soil, his eyes pleading.

"What?"

"Don't go with them," the sandy tom begged, "Please."

Ravensplash shook her head firmly, "I must."

"You're not like them!" Nettlesand protested, his blue eyes gleaming with wild desperation.

When the deputy frowned at him, he released her tail and pulled away, anguish in his eyes. She watched as he ran to the furthest edge of the camp, stumbling with every step.

She turned back to the crowd, straightening her shoulders. Confidence found its way into her paws as she padded calmly over to her Clanmates, who opened the circle easily and allowed her to join. She dipped her head to them and sat down with her tail curled neatly around her paws.

Hawkstar surveyed his Clan, "Now that we're all here, it's time to begin the ceremony."

Duskowl walked slowly to the center of the circle and stood still, waiting. Recognizing her cue, Ravensplash did the same and went to stand across from the other deputy. She locked eyes with him, but found no emotion hiding behind their bright green surface.

"An impure kit has arrived in this Clan," Hawkstar bellowed, looking down at the disabled tom, "And it is the will of StarClan that we do away with him, so not to taint the pure blood of the Clan."

Ravensplash and Duskowl stared at eachother, reciting the traditional words in unison, "Be gone, so that the noble cats of this Clan may continue on without your dirty presence tarnishing their bloodlines."

Hawkstar inhaled deeply, lowering his gaze to the kit. His eyes seemed to rest on the stump for a moment before he unsheathed his claws and drew a clean slash across the kit's tiny, pink neck.

Blood gushed out and the tom stopped writhing.

He lay still.

Lifeless.

"Long live LeafClan!" Hawkstar shouted, followed by the resonating yowls of approval from the surrounding Clan.

Ravensplash turned away from the body and pattered out of the circle. She lowered her head as she walked, "Long live LeafClan," she whispered. She thought she heard a crack in her voice, but she told herself over and over again as she went that she had stepped on a twig.

The deputy glanced upwards to see a thin ginger shape sitting in the trees, unmoving.

Nettlesand.

She was about to bound over and join the tomcat, but she stopped as she met the disappointment in his eyes.

He turned and slipped into the forest.

// a.n.
this book just got dark. like, really, really dark. so i'm sorry if you aren't comfortable with that sort of thing. but i find it interesting to explore uncomfortable topics. i was planning for the kit to be killed, and it seemed pretty trivial at the time, like just another part of the story. but as i wrote that scene i became aware of how heavy it was. i'm really sorry. also, you probably hate ravensplash now. me too. um, sorry again. even so, please leave a vote and a comment. i appreciate all of your wonderful support. ♡

» five

[image]

"Nettlesand!" Ravensplash's legs pumped with every ounce of energy she had in her body. The forest whirled by in a confusing blur of green as she followed the ginger shape that raced several fox-lengths ahead of her. The tom's small paws carried him quickly over each branch and patch of ferns. Ravensplash saw that with each stride he grew further and further away.

He was almost out of sight when the warrior skidded to a sudden halt. Ravensplash panted as she struggled to catch up to him, then stopped a tail-length away from his still ginger body. His ears were angled sharply, and he stood staring solemnly at something that lay in front of him.

Ravensplash followed his tired gaze to a clear pool of water that was fed by a smooth running stream. Bright green plants sprouted all around the water, with flowerbeds lining its edges. Ravensplash took a wary step forward, "The pool of purity," she murmured, laying her tail on Nettlesand's back.

The tom withdrew from her touch, his teeth bared and anger flashing in his cold blue eyes.

"Why are we here?" Ravensplash asked gently.

Nettlesand's eyes dug into hers and seemed to claw at her soul, "When an apprentice is made a warrior," he began, his voice icily calm, "They must bathe in the pool of purity to wash away their mistakes and their struggles. They become a full warrior of LeafClan and start a fresh life."

"Yes," Ravensplash could hear the impatience in her own voice, "Every cat knows that."

The blue in Nettlesand's eyes became a deep river as he choked out, "That kit will never bathe here."

Ravensplash stood very still, "Yes," she said.

"That kit never even had a chance."

"Yes."

There was a very long silence. The vibrancy of the green of the forest and the blue of the pool seemed to dull. Ravensplash imagined the flowers in their flowerbeds shriveling and their colors fading to gray. Her thoughts were broken as a low, despairing bird call inturrupted the thick quiet.

Ravensplash took small steps forward until she stood in front of Nettlesand. She gazed into his eyes and found that woven inside them was a clot of sadness. She closed her amber ones and set her head gently on his shoulder. His body shuddered against her embrace, but he did not move away.

After a few heartbeats, Ravensplash pulled away. "Let's go home," she mewed, "There's nothing left to do but go home."

For a moment she thought Nettlesand was going to object, but he only nodded.

» - - - «

Activity buzzed throughout camp as Nettlesand and Ravensplash entered from the bramble tunnel. The dark gray deputy surveyed the clearing, noticing Duskowl speaking with Stormpaw and Falconpaw next to the fresh-kill pile. She tapped Nettlesand with her tail, "I'll see you later, okay?"

Nettlesand shrugged, "Sure."

Ravensplash hesitated for a moment when she noted the emptiness in Nettlesand's tone, but she pushed the worry away and trotted over to join Duskowl. She could feel Nettlesand's gaze burning into her fur as she went.

"Since Frostlion isn't feeling well," Duskowl was addressing Falconpaw, "You'll be training with your brother today."

"What's wrong with Frostlion?" Ravensplash asked, and she could see the annoyance prickle in Duskowl's whiskers as she approached him.

The enormous, dusky brown tom opened his mouth to disregard her question, but Falconpaw was quicker.

"He's just got a few infected scratches from the scuffle with BreezeClan," the apprentice bounced on his toes, clearly picturing the exciting battle, "But he's a great warrior. He should be okay in a dawn or two."

Ravensplash purred, "Yes, I'm sure he'll be fine."

Duskowl's nose twitched, "We should be going now," he meowed commandingly to the apprentices, then looked at Ravensplash with hard green eyes, "You and I can discuss the dawn patrol later tonight," he promised her.

"Actually," Ravensplash leapt so that she blocked Duskowl's path, "I was hoping I could help with Falconpaw's training. If Frostlion isn't fit to go out of camp, I'd be happy to be a temporary substitute." She tried her best to look confident as she locked eyes with the other deputy.

Sniffing with disdain, Duskowl held his muzzle in the air, "Sorry, Ravensplash. I think it's best if I handle his training for now. I understand it's difficult being a deputy without an apprentice, but please don't bother me because of it. I'm sure Hawkstar will make you a mentor soon enough."

"I can help!" Ravensplash lashed her tail indignantly.

"Oh, for StarClan's sake," a voice sounded from behind them, "Let her come."

The two quarreling deputies whirled around to see Hawkstar eyeing them with amusement twinkling in his eyes. "It would be more efficent to have two warriors training them anyway. You can't do everything, Duskowl, despite what you may think," the orange tabby huffed with laughter, nudging the large deputy with his

forepaw.

Duskowl glared angrily at Ravensplash, but ducked his head in reluctant defeat, "Fine."

"Great!" Ravensplash smiled and curled her tail.

As the apprentices followed Duskowl through the bramble tunnel, Ravensplash felt hot breath against her cheek fur. "You'll need this practice for when you have an apprentice of your own," Hawkstar whispered in her ear, "And that won't be long from now; I think you should have one of Sunfeather's kits."

Ravensplash looked at him with shock, "Really?" she breathed.

Hawkstar's tabby chest shook with laughter, "Of course," he rumbled, blinking at her fondly, "It's been too long since you last had an apprentice."

"I won't disappoint you," Ravensplash promised her leader, determination blazing in her sharp amber eyes.

"I know. You never do."

With a swift nod, Ravensplash turned on her paws and raced after Duskowl and the apprentices. She sprinted through the bramble tunnel and caught up to them on the other end.

When they glanced back to catch sight of her just behind them, Duskowl grumbled, "It's about time. Let's head for the shaded clearing."

The patrol moved at a more leisurely pace than Ravensplash was accustomed to. She felt tempted to ask Duskowl if she could go on ahead, but restrained herself. Instead, she forced herself to enjoy the scenery and take in the mingled scents of greenleaf. A leaf rustled past her face in the quiet breeze, and she blinked as it came back and touched her ear lightly.

Up ahead, the trees parted to form a decently sized clearing that was lined with birch trees. Ravensplash watched as both Stormpaw and Falconpaw shot away excitedly and leapt into the grassy

opening. Sunlight filtered through the trees onto the forest floor, and Ravensplash let it warm her pelt as she padded after the eager apprentices. Duskowl followed with a stern expression, his ears pricked.

"We're going to be practicing combat techniques today," the dark brown tabby instructed as he made his way to the center of the clearing, "I'd like you to duel eachother. Ravensplash and I will make comments at the end."

"Claws sheathed," Ravensplash reminded the young toms, who nodded at her sheepishly.

Ravensplash watched as the two brothers got into formation. Stormpaw crouched low to the ground and circled Falconpaw, his form nearly perfect. In response, Falconpaw waited until Stormpaw was a tail-length away before he swatted at his brother's ears. Ravensplash narrowed her eyes; the tom's form was lazy and slow.

A yowling erupted from the distance, startling the apprentices into the shelter of the trees. Ravensplash and Duskowl followed them swiftly, and together the four cats crouched warily under a leafy bush.

The panicked cry continued, and Ravensplash peeked over the bush, her ears pinned flat to her head. Her heart stopped beating when she saw where the sound had come from.

A sea of cats rose over the crest of a small hill and plunged down into the territory below. Their fear-scent rode on the breeze and wafted into the she-cat's nostrils, but she found it intermingled with something else.

IceClan!

"That's IceClan," Ravensplash's voice shook as she spoke.

Duskowl's dark fur ruffled in the breeze as he stood and narrowed his eyes, "Something must be wrong."

// a.n.

another update! sorry it took longer than it has been, but nonetheless i hope you enjoyed this chapter. as always, please vote and comment!

» six

[image]

The wind shuffled the grass underneath Ravensplash's paws as she carefully made her way upwards, climbing a small, rounded hilltop. She slowed to a stop when she reached the highest point, feeling with some satisfaction that the breeze was quite strong up here. Her thin white whiskers twitched as she watched the IceClan cats climb the opposite slope of the hill. Their pace had slowed, and the blue-gray tom that led them looked beyond exhausted. Ravensplash felt her heartbeat quicken as she recognized the tom to be IceClan's leader, Pebblestar.

A warmth tingled against her pelt, signaling to Ravensplash that Duskowl had arrived at her left flank. She did not turn to him, but rather focused her amber eyes sharply in front of her, waiting patiently. Stormpaw and Falconpaw still crouched uncertainly in the undergrowth at the foot of the hill.

Pebblestar's tail drooped and his breath was short when at last he had made it to the top of the hill. His intense orange eyes flickered to meet Ravensplash's gaze.

"We have been driven out of our camp," the leader bowed his head in shame, "Many of our Clanmates have been captured by SplashClan and are being held hostage there."

To Ravensplash's surprise, a hostile growl rumbled in Duskowl's throat as he bit back a reply, "So why come here?"

Despite Duskowl's less than welcoming tone, Pebblestar didn't seem in the least bit perturbed, "Hawkstar promised us a place of safety if ever we were to encounter trouble."

"Of course," Ravensplash smiled, flicking Duskowl with her tail to keep him from protesting.

The blue-gray, shorthaired leader dipped his head gratefully,

"I knew you would be understanding, Ravensplash. Your favors to us will not go to waste."

A purr rumbled in Ravensplash's chest when she learned that the well-respected leader knew her name.

Ravensplash flicked an ear and led the IceClan cats down the slope of the hill. Stormpaw and Falconpaw crept out of the bushes, caution sweeping their expressioness. The dark gray deputy narrowed her eyes at them and they quickly fell into line alongside Duskowl.

"Hi again!"

Ravensplash glanced with surprise to her right, where Darkivy was trotting up to her happily. The she-cat felt a smile come across her face, "Hello, Darkivy."

"I can't believe LeafClan is offering us shelter," the warrior widened her hazel eyes, "Will Hawkstar mind?"

"To be honest," Ravensplash lowered her voice to a faint whisper, "I'm not sure. He was uncertain about the whole idea and only went along with it because I convinced him to. He probably figured it would never come up again."

Darkivy gave a tiny snort of laughter, "And now he's got almost an entire Clan moving in."

Ravensplash chuckled lightly, "Exactly."

The two she-cats drifted into silence and Ravensplash noticed her pawsteps fall into rhythm with Darkivy's. She felt surprisingly at ease with this foreign warrior by her side, so much so it almost concerned her. But she tore her thoughts from the subject and allowed the swift wind to encompass her and bring her a sense of calm.

She didn't refocus her attention until they had nearly arrived at the camp. Suddenly, the bramble tunnel came swimming into view and Ravensplash called to the swarm of warriors behind her, "We're almost there!"

Murmurs of excitement rose into the air as the IceClan cats recognized that the tunnel up ahead must be the entrance to their temporary home. An excitement seemed to rush around the crowd, and Ravensplash could hear the curious mews of IceClan kits a little ways behind her.

Ravensplash held her muzzle high and strode with confidence through the bramble tunnel, her shoulders rising and falling with every step. The massive sea of cats took turns filing in through the entrance, one at a time.

As she set foot in camp, Ravensplash watched the fur on her Clanmates' spines rise and tingle with anticipation. Their expressions became rich with shock as the IceClan cats began appearing behind her. She noticed Nettlesand with her brother, Fallenmoon, at the fresh-kill pile. Her ginger friend looked with interest at the newcomers, his ears perked and angled sharply. Fallenmoon watched with an even expression, his large yellow eyes shining with some confusion.

Birdpaw, a calico apprentice, took one, horrified glance at the IceClan cats before darting into the leader's den. Ravensplash blinked, a fresh wave of anxiety setting in.

By the time all of the IceClan cats had filtered into the clearing, Hawkstar was pattering over, his mouth set in a firm line. Ravensplash felt her confidence fading faster than she ran while chasing a squirrel.

The muscular orange tabby sat down in front of Ravensplash, a strange calm aura surrounding his body. He looked at her with his sharp green eyes, "What's going on here?"

"IceClan was driven from their camp and--"

Pebblestar stepped forward and greeted Hawkstar with a respectful dip of his head. "Hawkstar, SplashClan ambushed our Clan last night and took many of our cats captive. They have taken over our camp and we have no place to go," he glanced at Ravensplash, "Your deputy was quite hospitable and offered a place for us to stay."

Hawkstar's eyes flitted to Ravensplash, laced with anger. But the emotion soon faded, "Very well," Hawkstar sighed, looking to the other leader, "If you've no other place, LeafClan will lend a paw."

The blue-gray tom's eyes shown with an ocean of relief, "Thank you."

"Your warriors may sleep in the warriors' den, your apprentices in the apprentices' den, and so on. But," he closed his eyes gently and said the last few words with conviction, "You will be expected to participate in catching prey and take part in patrols."

"Of course."

Together, the band of IceClan cats explored the camp. Hawkstar ordered his cats to help them find their dens and then swept Ravensplash and Duskowl to the side with his tail.

"If they cause any trouble," he growled, "They'll have to go. And Ravensplash," he eyed the dark she-cat, "You're expected to manage anything that comes up. You brought them here; they're you're responsibility."

The large tabby tom grunted as he got up and stalked away.

» - - - «

Ravensplash tucked another bundle of moss into the nest she had formed towards the back of the warriors' den. She took a step back to admire it, then prodded its spongy bedding. "Does that look good to you?" She turned to Darkivy, who stood a tail-length away.

"Yes, it looks very comfy," the tabby she-cat praised.

"Good," Ravensplash dipped her head to the warrior and padded out of the den.

Nettlesand stood at the opposite end of camp, his back turned to her. Ravensplash tucked her ears against the wind as she bounded across the clearing to join him.

The tom jumped in surprise as she slid to a neat stop. He blinked at

her with large blue eyes, "Hello, Ravensplash."

"What are you doing?" The gray tabby questioned, her amber gaze wandering to the mound of sand that lay piled in front of him.

"This..." Nettlesand swallowed, "This is where they buried him."

Ravensplash cocked her head to the right.

She felt the light touch of a tail on her shoulder and turned to see her mother, Nightwater. "The kit," the old she-cat explained, blinking apologetically at Nettlesand.

The thin-framed deputy felt her toes curl. "I don't understand," she told Nettlesand as gently as she could manage, "Why are you so hurt by this? That kit had tainted blood."

She thought she felt her mother shudder beside her.

"How can you say that?" Nettelsand's voice was barely audible.

He shook his head very slowly before turning and walking away. Ravensplash felt a sting run up her spine.

"Be careful what you say, Ravensplash," Nightwater told her daughter gently, an edge of wisdom distinct in her words.

Ravensplash narrowed her eyes frustratedly as the elder spoke again.

"There's more to this world than blood."

// a.n.
hola mis amigos! please vote, comment, share, all the good stuff. i will be gone until july 22nd, so there will be no more updates before then. :(

» seven

[image]

The heather rustled as a large white rabbit darted away, its huge paws thumping on the uneven moor. Ravensplash felt power surge in her muscles as she chased it, gaining on its cream figure.

She tucked her ears to her head and careened across the grass, narrowly avoiding a boulder and skirting the edge of a small puddle. A stab of pain tingled into the pad of her left paw as it landed with full force onto a sharp stone that jutted from the ground. But the deputy pressed onward and was soon not even a tail length away from the fleeing rabbit.

Her haunches ached with the effort as she sprung from the grass and hurtled onto the rabbit. She delivered a swift, fatal bite to the neck as it flailed desperately against the weeds. The white body became still.

"Great catch!"

Ravensplash's ears perked as she looked proudly to Darkivy, who sat some distance away, a dead thrush at her paws.

"Thanks," Ravensplash mewed, lifting the carcass into her jaws. She cringed a bit at the feeling of its soft fur tickling her tongue.

It had been over a quarter moon since IceClan had moved in. The Clan, Ravensplash thought, had grown accustomed to the presence of foreign warriors. Even Duskowl had begun to mingle with the strangers, discussing hunting techniques and patrol schedules.

And Ravensplash found that she herself had discovered new friends within the ranks of the mountain Clan. Darkivy, for instance, was an admirable and compassionate warrior. She smiled as the she-cat blinked fondly at her.

"Good hunting?" A lean black figure trotted up to join the two warriors.

Ravensplash nodded to Fallenmoon, who'd joined them on patrol. "Most definitely," she cocked her triangular head, "Where's Nettlesand?"

Fallenmoon glanced backwards, "He should be along any minute now."

Suddenly the sandy tabby tom appeared over the crest of a sloping hill. His fur was sopping wet and clung to his small frame.

"Are you a StreamClan cat now?" Ravensplash teased when the tabby had reached them.

Nettlesand's blue eyes shone, "Fallenmoon pushed me into the stream!"

Ravensplash turned her head and raised an eyebrow at Fallenmoon, who stared at the tom with a glimmer of amusement in his enormous yellow eyes.

The young warrior shivered as a gust of wind swept across the moor. "I'm cold," he whined.

"We should probably head back to camp," Darkivy commented, observing how the tom's fur was plastered so tightly to his body that his ribs shown.

"You're right," Ravensplash agreed, bending her head to retrieve the rabbit from the ground.

The gray tabby she-cat watched in wonder as her brother nudged Nettlesand apologetically.

"I'm sorry I pushed you into the stream."

Nettlesand gave a side smile, "It *was* pretty funny at the time."

Fallenmoon purred his agreement.

"If you two are done wasting our time," Ravensplash batted her brother's muzzle gently, "We really should be getting back to camp."

As the group of four set out, Darkivy joined Ravensplash at the head of the patrol. "Pebblestar went to speak with Hawkstar this morning," she murmured through a mouthful of thrush feathers.

"About what?"

Darkivy gazed ahead to where the moor changed into thick, deciduous forest. "I think he's eager to take back our home. Maybe he wants Hawkstar's help in doing so."

A bee buzzed around Ravensplash's ear and she flicked it away. Her amber eyes narrowed, "I'm not sure Hawkstar will be willing to help."

The dark tabby halted, dropping her thrush. "But he needs to!" she protested desperately, "Please, Ravensplash, you have to convince him."

Ravensplash took a step back, stunned at her friend's sudden outburst, "Why are you so worried about this?"

"They have Cedarpatch."

It took a moment to remember the skittish tom. But soon an image of the thin brown warrior appeared in Ravensplash's mind. She blinked. *Why does she care about him? He's nothing special.*

"So?"

Darkivy's hazel eyes dug into Ravensplash's amber ones. "He's important to me."

A bird call echoed out from the forest and the sound of babbling water grew nearer. Ravensplash looked away from Darkivy and focused her attention on the rhythm of her steps and the gentle swinging of the rabbit between her teeth.

She could feel Darkivy's gaze boring into the back of her

skull, "You must understand, Ravensplash. Isn't there another cat that you love? A cat that you care for so deeply you'd die before you let anything happen to them?"

Ravensplash didn't answer.

Because there wasn't.

» - - - «

"All cats old enough to climb the trees of their forest, join here beneath the Black Elm."

Hawkstar leapt from the hollow mouth of his den into the wiry, complex web of branches above. He looked mighty as he sat in the fork of two joining branches, ready to address his gathering Clan.

Ravensplash stirred inside the warriors' den, awakening from her post-patrol nap. She lifted her head and glanced with droopy eyes around the den. There were indents in the mossy bedding where her Clanmates had slept the night before, but she was alone inside the hollow.

She stretched her sore limbs and pattered out the exit, a stream of blinding sunlight filtering down into her eyes. Squinting against the light, she found her spot at the foot of the Black Elm, next to Duskowl.

The clearing looked like a surging sea; both Clans milled about, squeezing by each other and competing for a spot with a better view of the LeafClan leader. Ravensplash spotted Pebblestar sitting quietly in a crowd of his warriors, watching Hawkstar with an even expression.

"IceClan has been here for over a quarter moon now," Hawkstar called when at last the noise had died down, "It's time they left our territory. We understand your home is overrun by enemy warriors."

Around the clearing, the IceClan warriors shifted nervously.

"Not too long ago I made a promise that I would help IceClan if ever they needed it," the orange leader continued, "And today I will fulfill that promise. LeafClan will fight alongside IceClan and help them to reclaim their home!"

Yowls of stunned approval rang throughout camp, an energy rising in the humid greenleaf air.

Hawkstar quieted them with a flick of his tail, "The battle parties leave tomorrow when the first shred of light appears. Let this be the birth of a long and powerful relationship. Long live LeafClan! Long live IceClan!"

"Long live LeafClan! Long live IceClan!" Ravensplash joined her Clanmates in the traditional phrase, excitement brewing in her stomach. *A battle! Maybe I'll be assigned to lead one of the parties.* Her tail swished in anticipation as she stood and searched the area for Nettlesand's ginger figure. But he was nowehere to be seen. Instead, her amber gaze halted to take in a figure that stood motionless amongst the otherwise bustling chaos.

Pineshade.

The chocolate brown, shorthaired tom was staring at her with intense olive green eyes. Something burned behind their shining surface, though Ravensplash couldn't place exactly what it was. She felt a shiver run through her body. Without breaking eye contact, the strange tom stood up very slowly and padded into the shadows of the warriors' den.

Ravensplash felt hot breath tickle her ear fur.

"Don't worry about him."

It was her mother, Nightwater. The entirely black she-cat was watching the spot where Pineshade had disappeared, and although Ravensplash knew she was trying to be comforting, a frightened look hid behind her tired eyes.

"He's been watching me lately," Ravensplash admitted, remembering the night BreezeClan had invaded LeafClan territory.

Nightwater narrowed her eyes, "I know. Never speak to him, Ravensplash. He's the sort of cat you don't want to get mixed up with. And my guess is that he's somewhat spiteful that Hawkstar chose you as a deputy over him."

"Well, I can't understand why," Ravensplash growled through gritted teeth, "I was obviously the better choice."

The old she-cat looked at her daughter with steady eyes, "You know that's not exactly true. Pineshade is a senior warrior, older and more experienced than you. And he's got plently of skill."

Why is she defending him? Ravensplash thought bitterly.

She was about to bite back a retort when she felt a nudge against her shoulder. She turned.

Nettlesand was smiling at her. His fur had dried since he'd been pushed into the stream by Fallenmoon. Now it stuck out in fluffy ginger tufts and his beautiful blue eyes were bright, "Ravensplash, do you have a moment? There's something I want to tell you."

// a.n.
hey hey hey everyone! i'm finally back with an update. i hope you enjoyed this chapter, and i can tell you that shit will be getting real next time! so be on the lookout for future updates. ;) ily all for your support. please vote, comment, share!

» eight

[image]

Ravensplash flicked an ear and pattered after Nettlesand, her flank brushing the broad leaves of a small birch sapling. The tom stopped and turned to her when they had reached a secluded corner of camp. She felt uneasy suddenly, a sick churning feeling rolling in her stomach.

The ginger tabby tom blinked his blue eyes, "I've been thinking lately. We're friends, right?"

Her fur began to tingle and she hesitated for a moment, "Erm, yeah."

"Right. So it's best if we tell each other everything, all the time."

The dark gray deputy was about to protest this, but suddenly Nettlesand looked very serious.

"And I think this is one of these things that I just really have to tell you. It's important to me. *But,* I'm slightly worried that you'll react badly. Maybe I'm just being paranoid but--"

Ravensplash had heard enough, she lashed her tail and interjected, "Nettlesand, I'm flattered. *Really.* But I don't think of you in, um, *that* way." Her eyes narrowed and she peered through them to watch the tom carefully. His head was angled to the ground, and he was shaking, the soft ginger hair on his cheeks rustling with the movement.

Guilt rippled into her gut and Ravensplash took a step forward to comfort her friend, "Oh, Nettlesand, I'm really sorry."

But the tom looked up at her and she saw that he was laughing, amusement sparkling in his eyes. He blinked at her, a grin spread wide across his features, "Ravensplash, you do know that I'm

gay, right?"

It felt as though she'd been hit by a monster and dragged across the Thunderpath. "W-what?"

Nettlesand rolled his blue eyes, "I'm *gay*."

Ravensplash stared at the ferns that grew just beyone Nettlesand's blurry shape, taking in the swells of sound all around her and wondering if she was dreaming.

"Do I need to explain what that means?"

The she-cat shook her head frantically, "Oh StarClan, no," she glared at him, "I know what it means. What is it you were going to tell me?" She forced her fur to lie flat and tried to surpress the heat burning in her cheeks.

Her ginger friend sat down, his forepaws arranged together neatly and his tail tucked across them. He shrugged and looked away, "Well now I feel weird about it."

"For StarClan's sake, just tell me!" Ravensplash snapped impatiently, curling her lip.

Nettlesand's fur blew to one side in a gentle breeze and he focused his eyes intently on the ground. After what seemed like centuries to Ravensplash, he mumbled something she couldn't make out and dread sparked in is flaming blue eyes as he waited for a reply.

Ravensplash gritted her teeth, grinding them in an effort to stay calm, "I didn't quite hear that."

"I like your brother!" The words spilled out of his mouth, but right as he spoke them, Ravensplash could see that he regretted ever saying them out loud.

The words hit her like a salty wave. She rested her tongue at the base of her mouth and stared at him in stunned silence, unsure of what to do next.

He glanced around nervously and his voice dimmed to a whisper, "Anyway, I wanted to tell you before I did anything about it. You have a right to know and I need your approval before I'll feel good about any of this."

An image of Fallenmoon standing apologetically next to Nettlesand's shivering figure meandered into Ravensplash's vision. She remembered their interaction earlier that morning when the ginger warrior had complained about being pushed into the stream. She imagined them standing at its bank, watching the crystal clear water flow across a pebbly bottom. *Does Fallenmoon feel this way too?*

Nettlesand's voice pierced her thoughts and brought her back to the present, "Good," he grumbled, "I'm glad I know how you feel." He shoved his way past her and scrambled across camp, into the shelter and quiet of the warriors' den.

Ravensplash watched him sadly, her paws rooted to the ground.

Wait, don't go.

But, of course, he was already gone.

» - - - «

"Wake up, Ravensplash."

A paw prodded her ribs sharply, sending pain riviting through her side. The deputy leapt to her paws and swatted her attacker, "What in StarClan's name do you want?" she snarled, her eyes adjusting to the scarcity of light. A dull gloom hung in the warriors' den and a large tabby shape stood before her. She relaxed as she made out the striped markings and green eyes of Duskowl.

"It's time for the battle, mousebrain," the other deputy growled quietly, "And stop shouting," he added, motioning with his tail to the sleeping bodies that lay curled up around them.

Excitement replaced the annoyance she'd felt just moments previous, "Great!"

Duskowl scowled at her.

"I mean... *great*." She made a point of lowering her voice to a whisper.

"Let's get going before you wake the entire Clan," Duskowl turned his massive body to the exit of the den, where the smallest bit of morning light filtered in. Side by side, the two deputies padded out.

Outside, a large group of cats stood gathered around the Black Elm. Ravensplash could see warriors from both Clans, but she could also tell that not every cat had been invited to come. The IceClan kits, queens, and elders would have to stay behind until it was safe to leave. She observed the group more carefully and guessed that some apprentices were staying behind as well.

Duskowl sat down beside her and raised his muzzle to watch Hawkstar, who sat calmly in the branches of the Black Elm.

"Warriors of LeafClan, warriors of IceClan. The time is now upon us. We will take our best courage with us as we go into battle to reclaim IceClan's home," the leader paused as several excited yowls sprung into the morning air, "There will be five battle groups. Four to approach the camp, and one to stay behind, just outside the perimeter of camp. Once the battle has begun, they will join the fight to reinforce our warriors."

Out of the corner of her eye, Ravensplash could see Duskowl nodding in agreement, his eyes fixated on their leader.

"Ravensplash," Hawkstar called, and the she-cat glanced to look up at him, "You will lead the first battle group. Take your warriors to the furthest edge of IceClan camp and wait for the other groups to get into position. Joining you from LeafClan will be Frostlion, Redwind, Berrythorn, and Whitepaw. You will also take Darkivy and Mistpaw of IceClan."

Ravensplash nodded to him as the named cats pushed their way through the crowd to join her. Darkivy blinked respectfully at her as she strode forward to join the patrol.

Quietly, the deputy waited as Hawkstar organized the other four patrols. She felt the anticipation of battle itching at her paws as Hawkstar named the patrol leaders: Pebblestar, an IceClan deputy named Palefox, himself, and Duskowl to lead the reinforcement. She watched as he then sorted the remaining cats into their patrols and, seeming satisfied with his choices, leapt from the Black Elm onto the forest floor.

"We go now, into battle!" Hawkstar's voice swirled into the air and enveloped the group as he dashed away, into the bramble tunnel with his patrol close behind. Ravensplash jumped to her paws and raced after her leader into the tunnel, checking her shoulder to be sure that her group had followed. She was met by the sharp hazel eyes of Darkivy, who ran swiftly behind her left hindleg.

Ravensplash fell back a small bit to join the she-cat. "Cedarpatch is going to be fine," she reassured the tabby warrior, surprised by the warmth in her own voice.

"I hope so," Darkivy murmured, blinking.

The enormous, swirling group of cats began to split. Ravensplash veered to the right, calling for her patrol to join her. Once they had fallen back into formation, they raced ahead of the other four groups. Ravensplash's mind spun. The forest had a violet haze to it, bathed in colors from the sunrise. She heard the blood in her ears. She felt the needles between her pads. She could smell the prospect of battle.

But more than that, *something felt very wrong.*

// a.n.
things are picking up now, and i am *so* very excited to write the next chapter! sorry if there are any mistakes, for some reason i'm exhausted right now and too lazy to go back through. point them out and i'll be polishing this chapter tomorrow. and maybe even writing the next. i'm excited. oh gosh. can't wait. ANYWAY please vote and comment! thanks so much. :D

» nine

[image]

Duskowl tried to focus his attention on the strange mixture of scents that wrapped around his body, flooding into his nostrils. The bitterness of treebark was intermingled with the less noticable scent of his own Clan, and then an even fainter scent of IceClan.

And underneath it all, he could smell something else.

Hunger.

The observation made him uneasy, and he felt himself stumble, one enormous forepaw catching on a small brown root. Its grainy surface scuffed his skin and he growled frustratedly, pulling his body upright again and breaking back into a run.

As he charged on, his patrol following just behind, Duskowl tried to pinpoint where the scent was coming from. But it seemed to swirl from all corners of the forest, making it near impossible to work out its source. He scanned the treeline, watching the other patrols ahead of him. Ravensplash's group had disappeared long ago, fading into the distant bramble. He wondered if she had yet to cross the border, or if already she was invading enemy territory.

Not many minutes later, the patrols broke out of the dense forest and onto the mostly flat, grassy expanse that led to IceClan territory. Up ahead, Duskowl could see the swift running waters of the mountain stream that served as a borderline. His tabby-striped legs autonomously quickened their pace and he turned his large head to yowl to the patrol, "We're almost there!"

And then they were at the edge of the stream. Duskowl stepped into its frigid waters, feeling tiny waves lap at his chest fur. He shivered and strode through the thick, icy substance, doing his best to avoid several sharp stones that jutted from the spongy riverbed.

Once he'd forded the river, he leapt onto the opposite bank and shook out his long fur, spraying droplets of clear water everywhere. A cold wind rippled across the grass and blew through his soaked fur. Chilled, he sat to clean his pelt as he watched the others finish crossing. The peaceful moment didn't last, however, as a small IceClan apprentice slipped as he was wading across. Duskowl narrowed his eyes, acting quickly to bend his neck and snatch the apprentice up before his scrawny body was swept away by the unforgiving waters.

He set the apprentice down on the bank and turned away from the stream. Just ahead was the pine forest, and off to the left rose a string of mountains so tall that their peaks were dipped in cloud fluff.

Hawkstar was sitting with his patrol several foxlengths ahead. The orange tabby raised his broad head, "From here on out, we must go with caution," every cat turned to listen, watching the leader intently, "This land is strange to us, and StreamClan may have patrols roaming the area. Keep your eyes and ears open."

The leader's last few words sat with Duskowl as he rose to follow the other patrols. They went carefully, walking slowly and observing how the pinetrees cast ragged, skeletal shadows on the ground. The land sloped upward on a steady incline, and the air became frostier with every step. Soon, Duskowl began to notice small patches of snow in the grass, and a dusty layer of white sitting in the highest branches of the trees. Then suddenly he could see his breath in front of him, dancing in the chilly air like a misty cloud. The hoots of owls echoed ominously from above, almost as if they were warning the cats to turn back.

Part of Duskowl wanted to listen, but there was another part of him that was struck with intense curiousity. Something about this strange new place captivated him. The way there was always a wind ruffling his ear fur, and the way his feet left footprints in the snow that grew deeper and more frequent as they trekked on.

Behind him, he heard Embermist mutter, "Snow in greenleaf? That's ridiculous."

As if on cue, tiny snowflakes began falling from the overcast sky. They travelled slowly, meandering about in the air before finally settling on a leaf, a branch, or the slicked back, snow encrusted grass. Duskowl watched as one fell gently onto his nose, sat there for a moment, then melted away into a single droplet of water.

He felt sleepy.

His eyelids drooped.

Then a painful sting swam across his flank. He was on the ground, his head pounded into the dirt. He thrashed back and forth to free himself, to no avail. Cries of surprise and of agony split the air and suddenly there were streaks of blood in the snow. Duskowl screamed for the first time in his life as claws were dragged across his back, up his neck and to his head. Warm drops of crimsion fled down his forehead and dripped down his eyes, blinding him. The sticky substance formed in pools on his face and a metallic smell stung his nose. And then he felt as if he were dying.

All his strength seemed to leave his body in that moment. Suddenly Duskowl understood what it felt like to feel nothing. A bitter darkness moved like a wave through his body. From the tip of his tail and up his back until it had engulfed his entire being.

He couldn't move. Couldn't breathe. His lungs screamed for air and his eyes began to meld shut from the blood.

Shrieks of pain and distress filled the emptiness. Masked almost entirely by the horrible smell of blood was another scent. The scent of cats from salty, foaming water and jagged red rocks. The scent of SplashClan.

How did they know we were coming?

The pattering of fleeing paws swirled all around him, and the vibrations they sent running through the ground found his side and shot up into his body. Fear clutched his gut like ivy suffocating a tiny sapling.

The deputy breathed hoarsely, remembering the others.

Ravensplash? Can you hear me?

His body shuddered against the sheet of ice that lay beneath him.

It's a trap.

// a.n.
a chapter from duskowl's pov! let me know what you thought about it. :D what do you guys think is going on? i realize all that was pretty confusing. just wait. we're only getting started. anyway, i really hope you enjoyed! i wanted to make this chapter suspenseful and dramatic, and almost make it seem like they were descending into hell or something. that's why there was all that description, so sorry if that isn't your kind of thing. but nonetheless, leave a vote and a comment! *and share this with all your buds!* :))

» ten

[image]

Snowflakes tickled her whiskers as Ravensplash treaded on, her slender tail held low to the ground. Up ahead, a large, rocky crag rose from the ground. A curtain of ice draped over its edge and icicles dotted the two sides that joined to form a sharp peak. Darkivy's hazel eyes flashed with recognition, "This is it," she murmured, "We're almost there."

Ravensplash gave a small nod, feeling her heartbeat quicken. "Stay close to me," she called over her shoulder to the patrol, "We'll go around to the far side of camp and wait for Hawkstar's signal." She flicked an ear and focused her amber eyes ahead of her, veering to the left of the icy crag in an attempt to stay downwind.

The eerie silence split like glass as a bloodcurdling cry sounded from behind the patrol. Ravensplash whirled around, her breath heavy. A thick fog had materialized in the forest and now crept in from all sides, obscuring her vision. She squinted through heavy eyelids as the ghostly clouds of white wove their way around dark umber tree trunks, but it was impossible to see anything. Frostlion narrowed his deep blue eyes, "It's the others! They've been ambushed!"

"Fall back and help them!" Ravensplash ordered, unsheathing her claws and breaking into a sprint. Frostlion and the others sped ahead, kicking powdered snow up behind them as they went. Ravensplash was distracted at the hammering of paws behind her, and she glanced backwards to see that Darkivy and Mistpaw were hanging back. "Hurry up!" she snarled, "This is your Clan we're fighting for!"

Darkivy met her eyes, but the expression within them was unrecognizable. The dark tabby slowed her pace even further without breaking eye contact, and eventually came to a complete stop. Mistpaw halted beside her.

Anger reeled in Ravensplash's gut and she whipped around, rearing on Darkivy. "What in StarClan's name are you doing? Get your tail in there and fight!"

But the she-cat just stared with flaming eyes.

"Our warriors are in there too!" Ravensplash hissed, her fur standing on end, "You're a sick coward, Darkivy," her sharp amber eyes flickered to Mistpaw. The apprentice looked stunned, even frightened. "And you," growled the deputy, "You're a pathetic excuse for an apprentice."

When the two cats just continued to stand motionless, Ravensplash whirled and raced away. *Whatever,* she thought bitterly, *I'm going into battle.*

She had barely gone two foxlengths when razor-sharp claws dug into her hindlegs and dragged her backwards. Ravensplash felt her chin smash the ice with such force that it went numb just seconds later. She watched with shock as her jaw left droplets of red in the pure white snow. The ice scraped her skin and she continued to be pulled backwards.

Her eyes flashed in alarm and she rolled to the right, kicking her backlegs to free them from her attacker's grasp. Ravensplash leapt to her feet and her vision refocused to reveal Darkivy standing, panting in front of her. "What do you want from me?" Ravensplash questioned through bared teeth.

Darkivy's fur began to settle, "Just come with me to camp."

Ravensplash flexed her long claws, "I will not!" she spat, "My Clan is in danger. *You* brought us here. If you'll just help me now, I promise we'll get your camp back. I promise Cedarpatch will be okay."

Just then, a nearby bush rustled as a figure crept out from behind its shelter. The figure was a small tom cat, with lanky brown legs and a skittish air about him. Ravensplash's eyes widened, "Cedarpatch?"

Then, there were a dozen other cats in the clearing, all smelling of IceClan. They appeared from behind trees, from underneath clusters of bramble, and from the depths of snow-packed hollows Ravensplash hadn't noticed until now. She scanned the area increadously, feeling as if all the breath had gone from her body. When at last she spoke, her voice was icily calm, "Somebody tell me what's going on right now, or I will slit every last one of your throats."

"I think it's better you see for yourself."

The voice came from a large, entirely black tom with soft yellow eyes. Ravensplash recognized his appearance and distinctive low voice. *Ebonystride,* she thought bitterly, *The other deputy of IceClan.*

"Just come with us," Darkivy pleaded, "We're not going to hurt you."

Ravensplash scanned the line of cats, suspicion alive in her amber eyes, "Aren't you all supposed to be being held captive in your own camp?"

Laughter rumbled in Ebonystride's chest, and he signalled for his warriors to get into formation around Ravensplash. "All in due time," the tom promised, "Everything will become clear soon. But if you want the truth, you're going to have to start by coming with us."

» - - - «

There were two enormous white pines at the entrance to the camp, and when Ravensplash glanced up, she saw that cats sat in their branches, watching her with dark eyes. She felt a shiver run through her body, but kept her steps confident and her breath even as she rolled back her shoulder blades and refocused her gaze ahead of her. The snow had grown much deeper and the fog much thicker. She wondered how IceClan cats even found their way around their own territory.

And it was so *cold.* In all her life Ravensplash had never been so

cold. Further back, her jaw had begun to throb, but it had quickly gone numb again from the rapidly declining temperature.

Beside her, Darkivy walked with Mistpaw. The two of them hadn't said a word, but Ravensplash could tell by the energy in their movements that they were excited about something.

The tunnel to camp was made of beautiful, dark wooded trees that were bent in by the weight of the icicles encrusted on and around their branches. The ice glinted like crystal in the light as the cats made their way through the tunnel. Ravensplash inhaled the frigid air, preparing herself for what may lay on the other side.

When they broke out of the tunnel and into the camp, Ravensplash had to squint and allow a moment for her eyes to ajust to the brightness. Everything sparkled from the beams of sunlight that somehow cut through the layer of fog and into camp. The snowflakes still fell, but slower and more gently than outside, blocked somewhat by the covering of trees that lined the edges of the large clearing. The dens were hollows dug into the sides of snowy hills, sheltered by bushes of bramble and large trees. A huge, dark gray boulder sat at the center of camp, with a plentiful fresh kill pile lying sheltered by its overhang.

And everywhere, cats milled about, though many stopped to stare as the patrol entered the camp. Ravensplash gaped in awe; not a single StreamClan cat was in sight.

This was not the image of a Clan struck down by a long-despised enemy, this was the image of a prospering family that stood as strong and as successful as ever.

She'd been lied to.

// a.n.
hey friends! sorry that took literally an eternity to update. school is crazy and sophomore year sucks and i have loads of work. but please leave a vote, comment, and share this story with *warriors* fans . i love ravensplash, she is my bb and she needs lots of support. adios.

» eleven

[image]

All eyes were on Ravensplash as she carefully followed the head of the patrol into the heart of IceClan camp. A sudden gust of wind blew a whirlwind of snowflakes around her, ruffling her soft ear fur. She paused mid-step to scan the camp, taking in the unfamiliar scents and faces of the many cats around her.

When they had reached the center of the clearing, where the large boulder stood sheltering the fresh-kill pile, Ebonystride and the others halted. The black furred deputy turned to Ravensplash and focused a pair of intense amber eyes on her. For a moment there was an uncomfortable silence between them, but then the tom bowed his head. "Welcome to IceClan," he meowed respectfully, "It's an honor to have such a highly esteemed cat among our ranks."

"Among your ranks?!" Ravensplash spat, narrowing her eyes to burning amber slits, "I was taken here against my will!"

"Ebonystride," Darkivy was pushing her way to the front, "Let me handle this."

Fresh hatred coarsed through Ravensplash's veins, "And you," she snarled to the she-cat, "I trusted you more than any other cat from an alien Clan. For StarClan's sake, I even regarded you as a friend."

Darkivy's fur billowed as another rush of wind blew past them. "Ravensplash... I never meant to hurt you."

"That's a fat load of badger-dung," the LeafClan deputy retorted, "You used me, and you used my Clan, and you *will* pay for that."

Hurt shone in the dark tabby's eyes, and she lowered her head in shame. From behind Darkivy, Ebonystride let out a huff of annoyance and he pushed past his warrior. "This isn't the time to debate morals," he flicked his tail matter-of-factly, "Go and get your jaw tended to, and have Gingerswan take a look at your hindlegs as

well."

But she held her ground, her fur bristling, "You still haven't told me why I'm here."

Darkivy opened her mouth to say something, but Ebonystride brushed his tail against her mouth. "It's for your own good," he said, shooting a glare at the other cat.

"I'll show you the medicine cat's den," Darkivy offered.

Ravensplash was about to protest, but her jaw throbbed with the effort. "Fine," she mumbled through gritted teeth.

With a sigh, Darkivy padded out of the circle of cats, heading for a small crevice in a snowy rockface that was tucked away in the far corner of camp. Ravensplash followed reluctantly, dragging her paws across the frozen ground, hyperaware of how many cats were staring at her. She kept her head down, feeling uncharacteristically self-concious. Even the pines that decorated the edge of camp seemed to grow eyes that bore into her as she walked.

The two she-cats slid into the narrow entrance of the den to find a large, regal looking tom with long, white and golden-brown fur sitting inside. Ravensplash noted how much warmer it was inside the den; she could feel her toes again. The cave walls were lined with woven lichen and two feather nests were tucked into the back nook. Rock shelves to the left held a wide array of colorful herbs for healing.

"How do you find this many herbs in such a bitter environment?" Ravensplash gasped, forgetting for a moment that she was being held captive. She tried to ignore the twinge she felt in her jaw as she spoke.

The tom chuckled, "There are plenty of herbs in IceClan territory, so long as you know where to look."

Darkivy blinked, "Gingerswan, this is Ravensplash, the one I told you about."

"I figured," the enormous tom nodded.

"She just needs some cobwebs for her hindlegs. And her jaw got hit pretty hard, too."

"Which, may I remind you, was all your fault." Ravensplash narrowed her eyes at Darkivy, who flinched at the accusation.

Her former-friend widened her hazel eyes, "I'm trying to help, Ravensplash! You're going to thank me for this one day," she lowered her gaze to the mossy floor of the den and her voice became a faint whisper, "I promise."

Gingerswan glanced awkwardly from one cat to another, then rose to go inspect Ravensplash's hindlegs. After a moment, he began applying a wad of cobwebs the the clawmarks. Ravensplash winced when the wounds stung as they made contact with the dressing. "Sorry," Gingerswan grunted. Then he made his way back to Ravensplash's front. "What happened to your jaw?"

"It just hit the ice when I went down. Nothing too serious," she lied, sitting down and drawing a paw over her left ear.

The medicine cat took a step closer to her face, "It's bruised pretty badly," he remarked, "But I'm not sure what I can do for this kind of injury, to be quite honest. I'll give you some poppy seed for the pain, but you're just going to have to let it heal naturally."

"I can do that," Ravensplash replied dryly.

Gingerswan turned to gather some poppy seed from his shelves. "And no patrols until you're healthy," he cautioned gently as he searched.

Ravensplash gaped at him, "Patrols? I don't even live here."

When he turned back, he held a mouthful of poppy seed. The tom set it down and smiled, "You do now."

» - - - «

By the time Ravensplash emerged from the medicine cat's den, the moon was high above the tree tops. Its white light reflected on the blanket of snow that layered IceClan camp, bringing to life a

ghostly glow that enveloped the clearing. The LeafClan she-cat blinked tiredly, feeling oddly calm underneath the stars. She tipped her head to the dark navy sky, wondering if her Clan was looking at the same sky at this very moment. Right now, they seemed worlds away.

Sadly, she thought of Fallenmoon and Nightwater, huddled under the black uncertainty of the night sky. She pictured Nettlesand, gazing at the moon and wondering where his friend had gone off to. *Or,* she wondered with a pang of regret, *Is he glad to be finally rid of me?*

From behind her came the crunching of snow as Darkivy exited the den behind her. For a moment the she-cat joined her, standing wordlessly beside her body and staring into the night.

"I don't belong here, Darkivy," Ravensplash murmured, closing her eyes.

But the she-cat didn't say a word, and only the sound of her breathing and the warmth of her body confirmed that she was still there.

For the first time in her life, Ravensplash felt a stream of fear ripple through her being.

"Come on," breathed Darkivy after a long pause, "Let's get some sleep."

Ravensplash was about to disregard the idea, but Darkivy was already padding towards the warriors' den. She surveyed the clearing, making eye contact with several IceClan cats that remained awake to guard camp. A heavy sigh escaped her, and she slowly followed Darkivy across the snow-covered ground.

And as they entered the warriors' den, an eerie tranquility entered her body and at last her mind went quiet.

// a.n.
thanks for reading! do you guys like gingerswan? he's such a

pretty boi ;-; and he has such a pretty name. anyway, i was listening to really emotional music while writing this chapter, so hopefully it's not insanely weird or something lmao. thank you endlessly for your support. c: i hope you continue to read. leave a vote and a comment, please!

» twelve

[image]

Duskowl's eyelids opened slowly, revealing the blurry image of skeletal trees against the contrasting whiteness of IceClan territory. He took a moment to lay still, hearing his own ragged breath move in and out of his lungs as condensation danced in front of his face. The world around him spun, warped and distorted like some cryptic nightmare.

Then a she-cat's amber tabby face appeared in front of him, "Duskowl? Duskowl, can you hear me?"

Her words triggered a ringing in his ears, and Duskowl squeezed his eyes shut again, praying for the high-pitched whine to stop. When at last it petered out, he reopened his green eyes and nodded.

"Good," the she-cat meowed, before moving to his side and bending down to hoist him upwards, "Come on now, we need to get back to camp."

The enormous brown tabby grunted with the effort as he pushed himself to his paws, relying a great deal on the support of the she-cat. His vision had begun to clear, and he now recognized Embermist, Hawkstar's sister. "W-what happened?" his aching muscles tensed, "Where's StreamClan?"

"Gone," Embermist murmured, "And so is IceClan."

Duskowl blinked, his head foggy as he glanced around. Red-stained lumps of fur dotted the battleground. But to his surprise, none of the bodies were of IceClan cats. "How did this happen?" he snarled, ears falling to his head and teeth bared in disgust.

Embermist's eyes were sorrowful, "It seems IceClan was involved with StreamClan this entire time. They fabricated that story of war to fool us and led us here to destroy our Clan."

"Those disgusting flecks of rabbit dung! I knew we never should've trusted them," Duskowl said grimly.

A group of cats was forming in the center of the clearing, with Hawkstar sitting at its middle. Duskowl leaned on Embermist's shoulder, and together they went to join their Clanmates.

The large orange tabby tom was covered in long gashes, and his eyes were dull, "Frostlion is dead," Hawkstar breathed, his head bowed in grief. Only then did Duskowl notice the limp body of the senior warrior lying at his leader's feet. Frostlion's once pure white fur was dyed a disturbingly vibrant red. "We must return to camp," Hawkstar didn't take his eyes off the fallen warrior as he spoke, "Only there can we rebuild our strength. Say your goodbyes now, to one of LeafClan's finest warriors, and one of the bravest cats I have ever known."

One by one, the LeafClan warriors limped forward to touch their noses to Frostlion's pelt. Duskowl leaned in to the old warrior's cold body, sending a silent prayer to StarClan to protect the fallen cat during his journey into the stars. Then, he split away and fell into the line of cats that followed Hawkstar toward home.

Realizing something, Duskowl picked up his pace, although his body protested. When he arrived next to Hawkstar, he slowed back down to walk alongside the leader. "Where's Ravensplash?"

Hawkstar sighed, dragging his paws as he led the slow march down the mountain, "I'm not sure, Duskowl. Her patrol returned to aid us in the battle against StreamClan, as you can tell, since Frostlion was there. However, I've spoken with Redwind, Berrythorn, and Whitepaw. None of them have any idea what happened to her. They say that *she* was the one to order them back to help us. And so they went."

"They didn't see what happened to her?"

"Apparently not."

"Well, then, she could be in grave danger," Duskowl's voice was a low growl, "After all, Darkivy and Mistpaw were with her as well."

Hawkstar narrowed his eyes, "I'm aware. But my duty is to my Clan, not my deputies."

Duskowl felt an uneasy feeling rolling in his stomach, but he lowered his head and trudged onward, "I understand."

His labored steps fell into rhythm as he and Hawkstar led their Clan, side by side, down the sloping hillside of the mountain. Snowflakes fell against their fur, and the brisk winds of the high altitude still blew all around them. With each pawprint he left in the snow, Duskowl grew one step further from the deputy they'd left behind.

» - - - «

By the time LeafClan reached their camp, the moon was setting and the first purple hued streaks of morning bled across the horizon. Duskowl limped through the fern tunnel, his green eyes soft with exhaustion. As soon as he and Hawkstar broke into camp, Oakflame bounded up to meet them. "You're late!" the medicine cat mewed, his eyes widening at the two cats' excessive wounds.

"Alderpaw!" Oakflame called to the air behind him, "Bring some cobwebs out here right away!"

Hawkstar's green eyes grew slitted at the sight of his brother, "Make sure everyone gets proper treatment before dawn."

Oakflame's stare was hard, "Of course."

Duskowl felt for a moment like the tension between the two littermates was so strong that it couldn't be cut with even the sharpest claws. He blinked, then stepped between the similar looking toms, "Hawkstar, I'll see to it that everyone gets directed to Oakflame and Alderpaw in an orderly fashion. Why don't you go get treated first?"

The leader's green eyes flickered, and for a moment Duskowl thought he was going to protest, but then Hawkstar nodded. "Fine," he agreed, following Oakflame towards the medicine cat's den.

Duskowl glanced briefly at his own wounds, which stung now

with more ferocity than when they'd departed SnowClan territory. But he did his best to push the pain to the back of his mind as he went back through the crowd of cats, determining by the severity of their scratches who would need to be seen first.

When Duskowl had picked his way to the back of the mass of cats, he spotted the pale ginger pelt of Nettlesand. He stalked towards the tom after noting the dried red and brown blood that clung to his pelt. "Nettlesand, you should go see Oakflame and Alderpaw too. Those marks look nasty."

"What?" the small beige tom glanced up Duskowl, legitimate confusion shining in his bright blue eyes.

"Go see Oakflame," Duskowl repeated.

Nettlesand just stared at him blankly for a moment, then gave a curt nod, "Okay."

As he pushed past the deputy to cross the center of camp, Duskowl stopped him with his tail. "Nettlesand. I'm sorry about Ravensplash."

The tiny warrior blinked, "Me too."

Duskowl watched as the tiny warrior made his way to the small hollow that served as the medicine cat's den. He breathed a sigh of relief, realizing that every cat had been attended to. His gaze wandered to the fresh kill pile, and his long-empty stomach growled. *I should have my wounds tended to first.*

The medicine cat's den was packed. Cats lay everywhere on its mossy floor, their sides pasted with bundles of cobweb and poulitices of mashed dock leaves. Alderpaw padded inbetween his Clanmates, inspecting each one in turn, while Oakflame sat at the back of the den with Nettlesand.

Duskowl hobbled towards them, catching a whisper of their conversation.

"I'm not going to tell anyone, Nettlesand," Oakflame soothed, "Just try and act as normal as possible." The tom stepped forward to

apply cobwebs to Nettlesand's ear, which was badly torn and bleeding profusely.

"Tell them what?" Duskowl asked, eyebrows raised.

Oakflame turned abruptly to Duskowl, clearly startled. He blinked, "Nothing that concerns you."

"Excuse me?" snarled Duskowl, "I am your deputy."

Nettlesand's blue eyes were distant, and he ducked his head to stare blankly at the floor, "Tell him, Oakflame."

"What?" Oakflame's voice was raised in a panic.

"Tell him," said Nettlesand, more insistant this time.

Oakflame swallowed, then turned his head back to Duskowl, "Nettlesand is... um, he's.... he's gone deaf in one ear."

Duskowl felt a shock wash through his body like a cool wave. He looked to the young warrior, "Is this true?"

Nettlesand didn't take his eyes off the ground, but there was no trepidation in is voice, "Yes."

A whirlwind of thoughts spun inside of Duskowl's mind. He knew what this meant. He knew what StarClan wanted when cats went bad. He knew what needed to happen to keep the LeafClan blood running pure.

Nettlesand would have to die.

// a.n.
not my baby! ;-; poor sweet nettlesand. let me know how you enjoyed this chapter with a comment. and please leave a vote and share this fan-fic with your friends! i can't thank you enough for all your support. ;)

» thirteen

[image]

Sunlight shimmered onto the reflective floor of IceClan camp. Ravensplash gazed out across the clearing in wonder, standing at the entrance of the warriors' den and watching as the warm yellow light bounced from the ground and danced in the overhanging ice crystals that dangled from tree branches.

When she'd opened her eyes from sleep several minutes earlier, the rest of the warriors' den had been empty. And now, noting the sun rising over the tall evergreen treetops, Ravensplash saw that it was nearly midday.

"All cats old enough to walk the snow of the mountain, gather here beneath the Frost Boulder!"

Pebblestar sat proudly atop the boulder at the center of camp, and a mist of breath sprung into the chilly air when he spoke. The silver tabby then flicked his tail and waited patiently for his Clan to gather on the floor below. As Ravensplash made her way reluctantly over, Ebonystride and Palefox snaked past her to take their places at the foot of the enormous rock.

Ravensplash settled at the back of the crowd of cats, wrapping her tail around her paws to keep warm. When the quiet murmuring died down, Pebblestar addressed his Clan, "As you all are aware by now, Ravensplash of LeafClan has joined us as of yesterday. She should be treated respectfully, just as you would any other Clanmate." The tom found her eyes in the sea of cats and gave her a polite nod.

"Objection," Ravensplash ignored the sweep of pain in her jaw as she rose to speak, "I am *not* your Clanmate. I never will be. LeafClan is my home."

Several cats mumbled their agreement as all heads swung back to Pebblestar. The broad-shouldered leader frowned, "Ravensplash, I

know this is difficult for you to accept. But you must try to make a new life here. You're not our prisoner."

She snorted and made her way through the throng of IceClan cats to the base of the Frost Boulder. "If you think I am so weak, so puny minded that I would even *consider* giving in, you've badly misjudged me."

Pebblestar's eyes flared as a swift breeze ruffled his fur.

"This meeting is over."

The IceClan cats dispersed, leaving Ravensplash alone. Her fur was still bristling and her heart pounded. *When am I going to get out of here?* Her ears fell against the shape of her head and she let a long sigh travel through her lithe body.

"Ravensplash?"

The deputy glanced upwards to be met with Gingerswan's soft smile. He stepped closer and purred, "Your jaw looks better already! Why don't you come to my den for a moment so I can refresh your cobwebs?"

"Fine," Ravensplash grumbled, following the enormous ginger tom across the clearing and into his den. The space seemed larger than last time, and even more inviting. The medicine cat had fashioned several more nests out of moss and feathers, and the herb storage overflowed with vibrant medicines. "You've been busy," she said, parting her jaws in a huge yawn and settling into a bed that was nestled against a rocky wall.

Gingerswan began sorting through his herbs, picking out fat bundles of cobweb, "Well, it gets pretty lonely around here," he admitted, his eyes sullen, "Especially when I don't have an apprentice to teach."

Ravensplash set her head on her paws, "Yeah, well, no kit wants to grow up to become a medicine cat. You might be waiting moons for that apprentice."

The large-bodied tom paused, clenching a wad of cobwebs in

his mouth. His olive green eyes flashed with some unrecognizable emotion, and he set the clump of cobwebs onto a rugged shelf. "What makes you say that?"

"It's like the warrior code says," Ravensplash said, shutting her eyelids, "The life of a warrior is glorious, exciting, and honorable. Medicine cats are cowards. No cat would choose to be a healer over a warrior."

"I did."

Ravensplash opened one eye to see Gingerswan standing above her, his ears perked and his tail lashing.

"I chose it, Ravensplash. The life of a 'coward'. And yet I run into battle too, I run with all my supplies and I treat my Clanmates. I *save* them. I spend hours a day hunting for the perfect herbs, sometimes getting caught in furious snowstorms on my way home and praying to StarClan that I'll make it through. I've been stranded out there for days. But *I always come back*. Because my Clan *needs* me," he held her gaze for several moments before snatching up the cobwebs and applying them to her hindlegs.

As he worked, Ravensplash remembered the glint of Hawkstar's teeth as he'd lunged forward and nearly bitten Oakflame. She rememberd Nettlesand's startled and distrubed expression when it'd happened. She remembered the fear-scent that'd risen in the air as Oakflame skittered away.

The two toms were brothers, and yet there hadn't been a day in their lives that Hawkstar had treated Oakflame as his equal. Ravensplash felt an unusual sadness tingling in her chest as she wondered why she hadn't questioned it before.

She didn't realize that Gingerswan was done tending her wounds until he spoke again, "There," he mewed, stepping back, "Get some rest." The large tom turned to leave.

"Hey, Gingerswan?" Ravensplash felt the words escape her mouth before she could stop them.

"Yes?" the medicine cat paused at the den's entrance and looked back.

"Thank you."

Gingerswan looked startled, then his face spread into a pleasant smile, and for a moment Ravensplash saw Nettlesand behind that smile.

He gave a tiny nod, and left.

» - - - «

Ravensplash rolled onto her side and groaned, placing her paws over her eyes. Morning sunlight filtered through the trees outside and into the medicine cat's den, casting leafy patterns on the sandy floor. Outside, the sound of cats milling about announced the arrival of a new day.

"Great news!" The incoming sunlight disappeared and then reappeared as Darkivy came through the entrance to stand beside Ravensplash's nest. The brown tabby she-cat shuffled her paws excitedly, "I ran into Gingerswan on my way over and he said that you're all good to patrol today."

Ravensplash extended a foreleg and stretched it, yawning, "Okay, well, can it wait a bit? Gingerswan had me up until moonhigh sorting herbs last night," she complained, feeling tiredness creeping back into her limbs.

"No, it can't wait," Darkivy prodded the deputy's side with her paw, "Although I am happy to hear that you're beginning to adjust to life here."

At that, Ravensplash leapt out of her bed, all her former grogginess dissapating in a second. "I am *not* adjusting," she snarled at the she-cat, "It was some stupid assignment he gave to me against my will."

Darkivy blinked, "Whatever. Let's just go, okay? Get something to eat from the fresh-kill pile and then we can leave."

Several minutes later, Ravensplash found herself on a small hunting

patrol comprised of herself, Darkivy, and two other IceClan warriors. As they marched through the territory, tasting the air for prey, Ravensplash couldn't help but notice how closely the other warriors were monitoring her movements.

"I'm not going to run off, okay?" she said finally, whirling on a small, russet and white tom who'd been staring at her for what seemed like hours.

The tom recoiled, "Sorry."

Darkivy stepped between them, "That's enough," she growled, her hazel eyes flickering to each cat in turn. "Eaglecloud, leave her alone. Let's just try and find something to catch."

The patrol leader, a she-cat named Flintcreek, paused up ahead. Her small pink nose was held high in the air. "Rabbit," she mewed to the others.

Ravensplash padded forward and scented the air as well. "Rabbit," she agreed, then sniffed again, "Male, no more than two years old."

Flintcreek raised an eyebrow, impressed.

The patrol followed the scent over the snowy crest of a small hill. The slope on the other side dipped into a valley, where a small white shape could be seen bouncing in the distance. Ravensplash darted away, kicking up snow as she went and ignoring Darkivy's exasperated call for her to wait up.

Her legs pulsed, their steps so rhythmic and practiced she forgot she was running and felt more like she was flying just above the ground. The shape of the white rabbit grew nearer and nearer until she was right on top of it. She unsheathed her claws and pinned the body to the ground, blood staining its perfect white fur. A cry sounded from its tiny mouth as she slashed its neck and then sat back, releasing her grip on its now-still body.

"That was brilliant!" Flintcreek praised as she ran to Ravensplash's side, "I've never seen a cat run so fast!"

Ravensplash felt a joyful thrill surge through her, "Thanks," she

panted.

"You'll fit in well here," Eaglecloud agreed, walking up to them more slowly and dipping his head to Ravensplash.

"What?" Ravensplash's voice faltered, and she glanced around, realizing the mountainous landscape around her and feeling again the cold of the snow against her paws. For a moment, she'd forgotten where she was. For a moment, she'd been back in LeafClan.

Darkivy bounded over and smiled at her, pride shining in her hazel eyes, "Come on," she purred, "Let's go home."

// a.n.
I AM SO EXCITED. i've planned out the rest of the story from here and it's gonna be AMAZING so grab some hot chocolate, some cookies, and stick around! there's seven more chapters to go. leave a vote! leave a comment! stay tuned! goodbye for now! ^^

» fourteen

[image]

The full moon floated ominously above, obscured slightly by wisps of tendril-like clouds. Duskowl placed his paws carefully as he walked amongst his Clanmates through the shadowed forest. The flapping of a bat in the branches overhead startled him, but he set his jaw and padded on.

There was a lone thought buzzing at the back of his mind. Nettlesand was half-deaf. He hadn't said anything to Hawkstar, or anyone else for that matter. But how much longer could the secret go on without being discovered, or thrown into the wrong paws? Such an event would cost Nettlesand his life.

Duskowl craned his neck to see over the bodies of those in front of him; up ahead the forest ahead began to clear and become a stretch of grassy field. As he looked, he wondered silently what had become of him.

Just a moon ago, I wouldn't have hesitated to expose Nettlesand.

He lumbered on towards the field, watching as Falconpaw struggled ahead of him to regain his footing after tripping on a lump of upturned soil. And then, suddenly, a memory came screaming back to him.

He was sitting in the center of camp, his Clanmates gathered in a tightly wound circle around him. Ravensplash was at the other end of the circle, a vague uncertainty resting in her amber eyes. Hawkstar stood the center of the circle, a small kit at his paws. Duskowl realized uncomfortably how much the kit's slick, firey ginger pelt resembled that of his leader.

Two seconds following, the kit was a lifeless scrap of fur with a single, bloody clawmark driven across his neck.

Duskowl gasped as he was jerked back into the present. He had

watched tiny, newborn kitten *die.* And who had been the one to kill him? The deputy's eyes drifted to the orange tabby shape of his leader, who walked several pawsteps ahead of him. Hawkstar had been the kit's father, and still he had killed him. Duskowl lifted his head painfully to observe the twinkling stars in the milky sky up above.

StarClan, is this what you wanted?

Although the stars continued to gleam, the air was agonizingly quiet. If StarClan did answer, he did not hear them.

» - - - «

Dozens of cats shuffled into the clearing, where an enormous, powerful oak tree stood with its long, winding branches raised proudly. The floor of the large clearing was made up of soft, flat stones, smoothed by the waters of a pond that had dried up many seasons ago. This was the Place of Washed Stones; the sacred place of meeting for all four Clans.

Duskowl sat at the edge of his Clan, his long fur billowing in the chilly night breeze. He sensed a body settle beside him and glanced over to see Hawkstar, who peered at him through sharp green eyes.

"I want you to ask around about Ravensplash," the Clan leader meowed, curling his tail.

The dark tabby swallowed, supressing the feeling of uneasiness that wove its way through his body when Hawkstar had appeared, "Good idea," he managed.

"Start with IceClan," a growl lined the edges of Hawkstar's words, and his gaze grew fierce. "Be as direct as you need to. And be sure to mention the fact that SplashClan attacked us in *their* territory when they were the ones we were supposed to be proctecting them from in the first place."

Duskowl gave a curt nod and bounded away, relieved to get away from the stern orange tabby. Several sunrises had come and gone since Ravensplash's disappearance, so he was relatively

relieved to see that Hawkstar was concerned.

He approached a fluffy, ash gray she-cat with soft opal eyes he recognized as an IceClan warrior named Flintcreek. She was deep in conversation with another IceClan cat, but when Duskowl grew near they stopped speaking and looked to him with expectant eyes.

"Greetings," Duskowl mewed diplomatically, dipping his head in a sign of respect.

"Duskowl," Flintcreek purred, "To what do we owe this pleasure?"

Duskowl kept his voice calm, "I was wondering if you know anything about Ravensplash."

He thought he saw a flicker of panic behind the eyes of the tom that sat beside her. But Flintcreek gave nothing away in the tone of her voice, "What do you mean?" she asked with her head cocked slightly to one side.

"The day my Clan went to lend aid to yours, she went missing. Furthermore, SplashClan attacked our patrols before they could even reach IceClan camp."

Flintcreek's eyes narrowed, "We *told* you they'd invaded our territory. Of course they were there to attack you."

"It seemed rather convienient."

The gray she-cat sniffed indignantly, "You think we set you up?" she curled her lip in disgust and pushed past him without another word.

Duskowl lowered his large head and sighed.

"You're friends with Ravensplash?"

He glanced back upwards to see the IceClan tom staring at him with huge, olive green eyes. His fur was long and elligant, and he was one of the biggest cats Duskowl had ever seen.

"Not exactly," Duskowl replied awkwardly, "Do you know her?"

The huge tom nodded, "She's in IceClan camp."

"What?" Duskowl opened his eyes wide with shock, "Are you holding her captive?" He lashed his tail and flexed his long claws.

A laugh rumbled in the big tom's throat, "Oh, no no no," he purred, "It's nothing like that. You were right about SplashClan, though. They were a part of the plan."

Duskowl snarled, flashing white teeth. He was beginning to lose his patience. "What plan?"

"I'm Gingerswan, by the way," the tom grinned.

Just as Duskowl was about to hurl himself at the tom, a yowl sounded from high in the oak tree. The gathering was about to commence. He shot a menancing glance at Gingerswan, then hurried away and sprang onto one of the lower branches of the tree.

BreezeClan's leader, Mintstar, stood delicately on a sturdy branch. She waited for the last of the murmuring to die down before speaking, "BreezeClan has been doing fine. Greenleaf has made prey plentiful in the moors, and Beechfur has given birth to a litter of four healthy kits. Their names are Copperkit, Windkit, Honeykit, and Beekit."

Mintstar sat to signal that she was finished, and immediately Hawkstar leapt up to speak.

"Mintstar fails to mention that she has been ordering warriors into LeafClan territory," the she-cat gazed back at Hawkstar defiantly as he described the scene, "We will tolerate it no longer. If BreezeClan continues to try and swindle land from LeafClan, they should expect a full-fledged war.

"On a lighter note, we have a new litter of kits as well. There are two, but their names are still yet to be decided upon."

The great orange tabby sat back down, and Duskowl froze with shock. Why hadn't he said anything about Ravensplash? He

supposed the leader didn't want to admit that they'd lost a deputy, but Hawkstar usually wasn't one to hold back at gatherings.

The next two reports went by in a blur. After the SplashClan leader, Rushstar, spoke, Pebblestar said a few words and suddenly the gathering was over, just as quickly as it had begun. Duskowl jumped off of his branch and landed skillfully on the ground.

LeafClan slowly condensed back into one group, with Hawkstar at the head. As the leader scanned the crowd to be sure everyone was present, Duskowl felt sleepiness lingering over him. He stretched his jaws in an enormous yawn, and waited patiently to begin moving.

From every angle came the harmonic chirping of crickets. And floating about in every direction, were beautiful, flickering fireflies.

The momentary peace was disturbed when a cat charged through the crowd to stand before Hawkstar. Duskowl blinked the drowsiness from his eyes, recognizing the brown, slender shape of Pineshade.

"Hawkstar!" the dark-furred tom cried, "Nettlesand is half-deaf!"

a.n. *//*
another chapter! we are approaching the climax of the story, and there are lots of twists, turns, and revelations ahead! keep showing your support with a vote and a comment! and be on the lookout for when the next chapter is posted. c:

» fifteen

[image]

Ravensplash took small bites of the shrew that was nestled between her forepaws. Its frame was surprisingly plump, and each mouthful warmed her body from the inhospitable temperature. A lilac hue grazed the edges of distant clouds, and Ravensplash lifted her head to watch as the sun began to rise. She hadn't been invited on the dawn patrol, but Cedarpatch and several others had gone.

There was a gentle rustling, and the LeafClan deputy sat up as another mouthful of shrew slid down her throat. Suddenly, a flood of cats padded calmly into camp, walking two by two through the tunnel of trees. Pebblestar was at the head, and he gave a small dip of respect at the sight of the she-cat.

"How was the gathering?" Ravensplash asked before she could stop herself.

Pebblestar's chest rumbled with laughter, "Fine," he purred, "LeafClan seems to be doing well."

Without me? Ravensplash pondered bitterly, her eyes narrowing.

As if he could read her thoughts, Pebblestar gave her flank a reassuring flick with his gray tail, "Don't worry, I'm sure they miss you."

Ravensplash shrugged and fell back onto her stomach to finish her shrew. She didn't bother to ask the leader when she would be released; no cat here seemed to want to give her that answer.

She had grown disturbingly more complacent since her capture over a quarter-moon ago. Rather than rebelling, her once fiesty attitude had steadily peetered into quiet frustration, and she now participated in everyday Clan life. She hunted, patrolled, and even shared prey with the cats who'd taken her from her home.

Thoroughly disgusted with herself, Ravensplash chewed the last bite of her shrew and tossed its skeleton into the undergrowth.

When she turned back around, she jumped in surprise at the sight of Darkivy looking at her with curious hazel eyes. "H-hey," the tabby she-cat murmured, shuffling her paws.

"Hello," Ravensplash replied coldly.

Darkivy lifted her head defiantly, seeming to regain some of her confidence, "I'm taking Mistpaw on her first deer hunt," she explained, "Would you like to come along?"

Ravensplash forgot her stony demeanor and met Darkivy's expectant eyes with shock, "*Deer* hunt?"

"Yes," Darkivy seemed pleased to have caught the interest of her former-friend, "Every IceClan apprentice goes on a deer hunt at some point during their training. You did so well that day we went out with Eaglecloud and Flintcreek that I thought I'd invite you."

"But deer are enormous!" Ravensplash cried.

"Are you scared?" Darkivy challenged, a mischevious glint in her eye.

Ravensplash flattened her ears to her head and gave a low growl, "Of course not. But how is an apprentice supposed to take down a deer? It's dangerous and *impossible*."

"Well, it *is* dangerous," Darkivy admitted, "But certainly not impossible."

The LeafClan deputy glared at her.

With a huff of laughter, Darkivy rolled her hazel eyes and turned to join a group of cats that had gathered at the camp entrance. Ravensplash recognized Palefox and Mistpaw, as well as two littermates named Eveningflash and Briarstripe. All at once, the patrol turned to look at her.

Ravensplash sighed and pattered grudgingly over. Palefox met her

with a smirk, "Decided to come along, have we?"

"Let's just go."

The jumble of cats streaked through the forest, dodging trees and rounded, snowy boulders. Ravensplash felt as though sharp icicles were penetrating her lungs; she still hadn't gotten used to the everlasting cold. As they ran, she scented a nearby hare, but if Darkivy and the others had noticed, they showed no interest. They pressed on, and soon Ravensplash realized they were following a pungent, dusky scent that grew more and more apparent with every pawstep.

Suddenly, just as Ravensplash was growing dizzy from the cold, Palefox halted. Eveningflash and Briarstripe stopped beside him, their similarly patterned coats bristling. Darkivy and Mistpaw stopped a tail-length behind, and Ravensplash watched as Darkivy lay her tail comfortingly on her apprentice's back.

"This way," Palefox whispered, his creamy ginger fur standing on end. He ducked behind some bushes that grew at the base of a dip in the ground and signalled for the others to join him.

Ravensplash fell into line beside Darkivy and dropped into a crouch. "Why are we-?"

Darkivy hushed her by sweeping her own tail across Ravensplash's mouth. Then, she flicked an ear, pointing towards a gap in the undergrowth. Ravensplash peered through it, feeling her heart beating in her ears.

There they were. An entire herd of deer, grazing peacefully on whatever they could find where there was no snow. Only one was male, a tall, dark buck with enormous, skeletal antlers that looked like dry tree branches. And towards the center of the herd were half a dozen fawns, sporting lanky legs and big brown eyes.

Eveningflash pointed her tail towards a strong-looking doe at the edge of the herd. "That one," she suggested to Palefox.

The IceClan deputy shook his head, "No, she is too strong."

"What about there?" Mistpaw squeaked excitedly, thrusting her muzzle in the direction of another doe. Ravensplash followed the gesture to a smaller female who looked tired and old. Patches of her fur were missing, peeling away to reveal bare skin, and her long legs looked raggedy and weak.

"Perfect!" Palefox nodded, "She is sick."

"Well done!" Darkivy praised, giving the fur between Mistpaw's ears a quick lick.

The apprentice's eyes glimmered proudly, "Thanks, Darkivy."

Palefox turned so that he could see each cat, and they gathered around him in a semicircle. Ravensplash found a spot between Darkivy and Briarstripe and settled in to listen.

"Okay," mewed Palefox, his pelt being blown to one side by a crossbreeze, "Here's the plan. Ravensplash and I will get as close as we can without startling the herd, then we'll pursue the doe, separating her from the rest. While we get into position, you four will go to wait up there," he gestured with one paw to a space further ahead that was sheltered by brambles, "When the doe splits off, give chase."

Ravensplash felt a prickle of excitement nagging at her paws. She nodded in understanding, and waited with Palefox while Darkivy led the others away. Several moments passed.

At last, Darkivy gave a nod from her position, hiding in the brambles just left of the herd. Ravensplash felt her heart leap into her throat as Palefox dropped low to the ground and began pulling himself forward. She followed very carefully, her belly fur brushing the snowy earth.

The deer were even larger up close. Their huge bodies rippled with muscle, and their tall ears rested against their heads as they grazed. Fear crept up Ravensplash's spine. *How are we supposed to kill one of these things?*

She had no more time to think. Palefox waggled his haunches

and shot after the doe, his paws thumping hard against the ground. Ravensplash followed with all her speed, and the deer scattered in every direction. Cries of alarm blew into the air.

Ravensplash felt the powerful vibration of hooves against the ground as she raced, terrified, after the doe. Palefox leaned on her, and together they veered left, driving the doe towards the cluster of brambles. Seconds later, Darkivy, Mistpaw, Eveningflash, and Briarstripe leapt from the undergrowth, spitting with fury. The doe screeched in surprise and her right knee buckled, but she swiftly recovered and continued to run.

Briarstripe jumped into the air, claws outstretched, and landed a hard blow on the doe's left hindleg. Blood gushed from the wound, running down into the snow. Mistpaw followed suit, realizing her opportunity, and threw herself onto the deer's behind. The doe slowed, wailing in pain, and began bucking her hindlegs.

"Don't get kicked!" Palefox cautioned, and Mistpaw fell to the ground.

The doe took off again, but Ravensplash could tell that her energy was beginning to drain. She nudged Mistpaw back to her feet, and yowled for the patrol to follow her. She sped ahead, her claws unsheathed and legs pulsing. Her breath was short, and her paws ached with the effort of running. But she forced her thoughts from the pain and focused on the shape of the doe that ran only a foxlength ahead of her.

"Now!" she cried, and lunged forward, catching the right backleg of the doe in her claws. Darkivy appeared on the left flank of the deer, dealing one powerful strike to her side. The doe slowed her footsteps until she was walking. She staggered forward, eyes round with terror.

Palefox led Eveningflash and Mistpaw to the deer's front, and together they grabbed onto the animal's enormous neck. Briarstripe hurried after them and drew her claws down the side of the doe's head.

Without warning, the deer crashed onto her side, blood

staining her patchy flanks. Ravensplash fell with her, then stood and shook the snow from her pelt. The sound of labored breathing filled the blood-scented air.

Ravensplash looked to Mistpaw, who was gazing at the doe with a pride that seemed to be somewhat tinged with sadness. Quietly, the apprentice crept forward and bit down hard on the doe's neck. The animal shuddered, and then its eyes glazed over.

Mistpaw sat back, aghast. She parted her crimson muzzle, "We did it!"

"This will feed the entire Clan for days!" Ravensplash panted.

"We can drag it most of the way, and then I'll get help when we're close to camp." Darkivy suggested, grabbing one leg in her teeth.

Palefox dipped his striped cream head, "Very well," he agreed with a deep mew, stepping forward to take another leg.

"Ravensplash?"

Ravensplash whirled around at the sound of a shockingly familiar voice. She felt a frosty wind pierce through her fur as she stood, gaping, at the figure in front of her. The figure of a dark tabby tom with unforgettable, blazing green eyes.

"Duskowl!"

a.n. //
this was a long one. i hope you're enjoying! i thought it was cool to write the deer hunt scene, and it reminded me of the way a wolf pack takes down prey. also, fun fact: it literally takes me three hours of straight writing to write each of these chapters. leave a vote and a comment because that's a lot of dedication! :p love you all.

» sixteen

[image]

"They're going to kill him! They're going to kill Nettlesand!" Duskowl's voice was laced with intense panic and desperation. His claws were unsheathed, and nervously scraped at the ice beneath him.

Ravensplash felt her chest tighten, and the colors around her seemed to fade to gray. She tried to speak, but nothing came out. Her throat felt as though it were burning. Her paws began to tingle and then go numb. She could feel the eyes of the IceClan cats on her back, parting her fur and scathing her flesh.

When at last she spoke, she was surprised at the determination and strength in her own voice, "Take me to him."

Duskowl nodded quickly, "Okay, but we have to hurry."

Ravensplash felt a muzzle against her shoulder. She turned to be met with Darkivy's sympathetic hazel eyes. "Let me go with you. Let *us*." Behind her gaze was a web of complex emotions. A maze filled with pathways of laughter and memories and a friendship that once was. But Ravensplash read the web with ease, and she saw Darkivy's honest desire to serve her old friend.

"Okay," Ravensplash blinked her thanks, then turned to the others. She addressed Mistpaw, "Go back and get your Clanmates. Tell them that if they are willing, I call upon them for help. My friend is in danger." Mistpaw gave one frightened nod, then raced off.

"We have to go--"

"I know," Ravensplash assured Duskowl, laying her tail on his back. She met his eyes, "Lead the way."

Within seconds they were sprinting through the forest, hearts pounding behind their ribs. Ravensplash found that her paws ached from the deer hunt, but she could not rest yet. Her subconcious

wandered to an image of Nettlesand's grinning face, then to one of him standing beside the Pool of Purity, a more solemn expression written across his features as he gazed into its clear water. Then her thoughts snagged upon another image, one she hadn't seen before. She saw herself, slumped over a sandy-pelted body in the center of LeafClan camp.

No! She screamed inwardly, imagining for a second a life without her friend. *I* have *to save him.* She pictured his disappointed face peering in at her from the outskirts of camp. *Without him, I am nothing.*

She pictured his soft rumpled fur as he'd cried, "You're not like them!"

Without him, I am nobody.

Her legs pounded faster, harder, until she thought her lungs would burst. Darkivy panted at her side, clearly a fair bit exhausted from the earlier hunt as well. But together, they continued to run.

By the time the border appeared ahead of them, there was a fiery sunset burning in the sky. Duskowl led the way carefully across the mountain stream, and as Ravensplash crossed, the water pierced her sides like shards of ice digging into her skin and pulling it up in bloody layers. She felt raw, uncensored, like she was seeing her own true self for the first time.

And perhaps she was.

Soon she was seeing bits and pieces of her old home, landmarks that pulled her back into the life of a LeafClan deputy. The meadow of flowers that apprentices played in, the old badger set that now flooded every rainy season. Pieces of her old life. But would it be her life again?

And at last she saw the tunnel up ahead, its wavering ferns dancing in the evening light as the sun left the sky. The brambles casting long shadows onto the flattened grass beneath. The pawprints left by her patrolling Clanmates and the distinct pathway eroded away by their bodies as they returned to camp. As she travelled that

pathway once again, she felt as though she were dreaming.

And then all at once, they burst through the entrance and into camp. Ravensplash skitted to a halt beside Duskowl, with Palefox, Eveningflash and Briarstripe flanking them on either side. The five cats stood there, panting, staring at the scene that stood in front of them.

The entire Clan had formed an enormous semi-circle, with Nettlesand at its focal point. Hawkstar stood there as well, his eyes glinting ominously in the dull light and his long, sharp claws dug into the earth. Ravensplash noticed Fallenmoon standing at the edge of the circle, his yellow eyes round with terror.

So it was true. Her Clan, her *family*, had gathered to kill one of its own warriors. A sick knot twisted inside her belly.

"You're not like them."

The face of Hawkstar's lame kit flashed in her mind.

"You're not like them!"

"Stop!!" she wailed, and in that moment she knew even StarClan could here her cry.

Hawkstar turned, slowly, to face her. His eyes widened with shock, then withered with confusion. "Ravensplash!"

The rest of the Clan was staring, too, and Ravensplash heard murmurs of surprise begin to ruffle the air. Fallenmoon's mew of delight rose up above them, and Nightwater's relieved cry rang into the clearing as well. And, from the center of the clearing, Nettlesand beamed at her with his familiar goofy smile. She felt a warmness growing inside her body, and she stepped out from the group to greet Hawkstar.

"I've come home," she mewed to the leader, meeting his inquisitive green gaze. She glanced around, her tail twitching and the unease returning to her stomach, "But *what* is going on here?"

When Hawkstar spoke, he seemed to be surpressing a growl.

"Nettlesand is half-deaf."

Ravensplash dropped her head and sighed. The breath came out slow and even, and she could feel the expectant eyes of her Clanmates resting on her. She gently brought her head back up and scanned the area. And when she finally felt that she was ready, she addressed her Clan.

"So, Nettlesand is half-deaf. And I suppose you want to kill him for this?" her sharp amber eyes flickered to look at Hawkstar.

He nodded curtly.

Ravensplash thought for a moment, then suddenly found herself laughing. "You want to kill Nettlesand because you believe his blood is tainted!" her laugh rose high above all else, echoing throughout camp. The Clan stared at her with disbelief for a couple of seconds, then Ravensplash closed her eyes and regained her composure. "But blood is not in our looks, nor in our successes," she opened her eyes and looked directly at Hawkstar, feeling power surge through her veins, "nor in our abilities."

The orange tabby seemed uncomfortable, as though he understood what she was hinting at. Then there was a flash of pain behind his green eyes, and the hint of a memory hiding inside.

"Blood," Ravensplash planted her forepaws wide apart from eachother, standing tall, "Is in the way we care for our Clanmates, and in our honesty, our integrity, and our compassion. Our value is in who we are as warriors, as friends, as family. Is a crippled kit not still a kit? Is a blind elder not still an elder? Is Nettlesand really devalued by what his *ears* can't do, instead of being commended for what his *heart* can? Why do we hurt one another? The only blood that is tainted is the blood of the cats that turn against their Clanmates, and the cats that hunt for everything wrong with the ones they are surrounded with.

I have made so many mistakes. And I am so, so very sorry for that," Ravensplash's eyes shone with regret, "But since going to IceClan I have learned a lot about this world we live in, and a lot about how we should treat our friends," she glanced at Palefox, Eveningflash,

Briarstripe, and then at Darkivy, "They have taught me what LeafClan seems to be missing."

She curled her tail and straightened her back, turning once again to face the Clan, "From the tips of our ears to the ends of our tails, *blood is what makes us good warriors.* And to be a good warrior, first you have to be willing to be kind."

There was a long, heavy silence.

As Ravensplash glanced around, she saw the shocked expressions on her Clanmates' faces. She caught Nightwater's eye, and saw that her mother was smiling. Several other cats were glancing at one another with intense but careful agreement.

Then a defiant voice spoke out, "I guess they told you, then?"

Ravensplash blinked, then peered into the crowd to see Pineshade stalking forward. She felt herself stiffen, "T-told me what, exactly?"

"Where you actually came from," Pineshade was only a tail-length from her face, and he stared at her with shrewd, olive green eyes, "That's why you're doing this. You're trying to save your own tail."

A lump was beginning to manifest at the back of her throat, but Ravensplash held her ground. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"You're an IceClan cat!"

A gasp swept the clearing.

Pineshade lashed his slender brown tail, "That's right!" he called to the stunned crowd, "Ravensplash was an IceClan kit, taken in by Nightwater. She's pure IceClan blood."

Chaotic murmuring broke out amongst the cats, but they were silenced when Nightwater parted them to come stand before Pineshade. "You were there?" She didn't seem surprised, but she asked the question anyway.

"Yes, I was there," Pineshade snarled.

"Then, it's true?" Ravensplash squeaked, feeling a shiver run from her head to the tips of her toes.

Nightwater bowed her head.

"She's *IceClan!*" Hawkstar cried from several fox lengths away, a fire burning fiercely in his eyes. He unsheathed his claws, and time seemed to slow down as he charged forward, heading straight for the dark furred deputy.

But Ravensplash only watched, still too stunned to move. And something else was forming in the back of her mind. Something that suddenly made sense. She glanced to her right, where Darkivy stood, her dark tabby coat bristling and her muscles tensed.

Darkivy is my sister!

a.n. //
hello guys! big plooooooot twists! and we only have four. chapters. left. can you believe it? leave a vote and a comment please! ily! <3

» seventeen

[image]

Ravensplash cried out as she was bashed into the textured bark of an old elm. She fell to the ground, feeling a dark, cold wave of unconciousness flood over her. But just as she thought she was drifting away, the feeling of hot breath on her face shook her awake. She was met with Hawkstar's muzzle just inches away from her own, his jaws parted and dripping with saliva.

Hawkstar planted his right forepaw on her chest, further pinning her against the tree. Then he unsheathed his claws and slowly sank them past her fur and into her flesh. "You filthy liar!" he snarled, and flecks of warm spit splattered onto Ravensplash's face.

"Get away from me!" Ravensplash howled in pain, struggling underneath the weight of the enormous tabby.

"I trusted you," Hawkstar's green eyes flashed with insane anger, "I made you my deputy. I supported you. I thought you were *LeafClan!*" He grabbed her with his forepaws and pulled her away from the tree, only to smash her back against it seconds later.

Pain like the venomous fangs of a snake coarsed through Ravensplash's spine. "I *am* LeafClan!" she screamed, begging for StarClan's mercy. *Take me. Just take me now if you must.*

But Hawkstar wasn't finished yet. He lunged forward, snatching the she-cat's scruff in his teeth, and flung her onto the solid ground. Bits of rock stung her sides as she landed, and all breath left her body. Ravensplash felt sticky blood oozing into pools around her, and she faintly registered the sounds and images of a battle going on around her. *Someone help me!*

Dread scorched her soul as Hawkstar stalked forward and appeared above her. His fur was bristling, and his muzzle was now stained with fresh pink blood. The storm of emotions raging behind his crystal green gaze terrified her, and suddenly she found herself

shaking.

He leaned in close, and Ravensplash prepared herself for it to be over.

"I even *loved* you."

The words seemed to float out of his mouth. Ravensplash felt her body tighten in disgust. Fury seeped through every vein in her body, and suddenly her strength returned.

And then she was on her feet again. And then she was fighting back. Blow after blow, Ravensplash drove her leader back. She swung with her right paw first, and her claws drew long marks across Hawkstar's shoulder and back. Then came her left paw, which collided with his jaw and knocked him sideways.

Ravensplash moved quickly now, pulling herself onto his body and holding him against the ground. Hawkstar thrashed in resistance, but Ravensplash used her hind claws to deliver a hard blow to the soft flesh of his stomach. His blood was beginning to flow; she could smell it. This would be over soon.

Every horrible thing Hawkstar had said and done in the past came racing back to Ravensplash, and she saw visions of the cats he'd hurt. She saw the anguish he'd caused the world. She saw the tiny face of his kit; the one he'd murdered with his very own claws.

And so she bent down, latching Hawkstar's neck in her teeth. She felt powerful, *unstoppable.* Surely this was the way it was meant to be.

She bit down.

A pitiful squeal escaped the tom's throat, and then he fell limp.

» - - - «

It seemed as if the sky had filled with ash, because all of a sudden, the world was very dark.

Everything was silent. The crickets had stopped chirping, the

frogs had stopped peeping, and tendrils of late-night fog were creeping into camp.

Ravensplash raised her head from where she'd collapsed beside Hawkstar's body. Her Clan was beginning to gather, and the sounds of battle had completely dissapated. She surveyed the approaching crowd weakly, noticing some IceClan cats among the ranks. *Mistpaw must have sent the help I asked for.*

Suddenly, Fallenmoon came racing forward. He bent over her and sniffed, "Are you okay?"

"Fine," grunted Ravensplash, "How long was I out?"

"Just a minute or two," her brother replied, "The battle ended pretty quickly once cats started realizing that Hawkstar was dead."

Ravensplash parted her toes and stretched, feeling the soreness in her tired muscles. "And what about Pineshade?" she asked, glancing around for any sign of the dark brown tom.

"Dead as well," Fallenmoon assured her, resting his tail on her hindleg. Then, something occured to him and he turned to hurry away. "I'll get Oakflame!" he called over his shoulder as he left to search for the medicine cat.

Gingerly, Ravensplash gathered her paws underneath her and pushed herself upwards. Her flanks stung with post-battle pain, and she had to work hard to remain upright. Dizziness and nausea plagued her body.

Suddenly a voice rang out from behind her, "There she is! Ravensplash!"

Ravensplash spun around to see Nettlesand and Darkivy padding up to her. Both their faces sagged with worry. "I'm fine," she purred, happiness sprouting in her chest.

"Thank StarClan!" Nettlesand mewed, brushing his muzzle against hers, "I was so afraid that Hawkstar had killed you! That fish-smelling, fox-hearted bee-brain didn't know how to speak with anything but his claws."

"And I'm happy you're okay too," Darkivy added awkwardly, "Because, um, you know. It would be really bad for LeafClan if their leader and one of their deputies died in the same day."

Ravensplash let out a painful chuckle, "Darkivy, you don't have make up excuses. I'm happy to see you too."

"Ah, look at you two. Sisters, reunited at last."

All three cats turned to pinpoint the source of the voice. It was Nightwater, just a few tail-lengths away. She was smiling, and the light gray hairs around her eyes blew gently in a cool breeze.

Darkivy scuffled her paws, "Erm, about that..."

"It's okay, I figured it out earlier," Ravensplash touched her tail comfortingly against Darkivy's pelt, "But what I *don't* understand is how it happened. How did you end up raising me, Nightwater, if I was an IceClan kit?"

The elder's eyes lit up with a memory that had gone unspoken for so many moons, "Ah, yes," she breathed, "You see, I had just given birth to Fallenmoon, and his little sister: Ravenkit. But I kitted far from camp, and Ravenkit died just minutes after her birth. Then, as if StarClan had willed it to be so, along comes this kit, floating down the mountain stream. She was half-drowned, so of course I went in and saved her."

"That kit was me?" Ravensplash guessed, her mind racing.

Nightwater bowed her head, "Yes. I took you in and raised you as my own, but Pineshade must have been watching from the undergrowth..." the old cat then lifted her gaze and starlight glittered in her eyes, "Nevertheless, you will *always* be my daughter, no matter where you came from."

Ravensplash touched her nose against her mother's and purred.

For the first time in her life, she felt complete.

» - - - «

As Ravensplash emerged from the medicine cat's den, she was met by what felt like a thousand stares. Her Clan sat gathered around the Black Elm, impatiently murmuring to one another. Ravensplash noticed that most of them carried battle-wounds, and silently she wondered who had been fighting for Hawkstar. Sudden fear rose in her throat. *Am I safe?*

But she pressed on, not daring to make eye contact with any one of her Clanmates. She parted the crowd with long, confident strides, and leapt up into the low-hanging branches of the Black Elm. Several moments later, Duskowl joined her, and she acknowledged him with a respectful nod.

"Cats of LeafClan, you may be wondering where I've been these past sunrises. The truth is, I was held captive in IceClan camp. I'm sure many of you are aware of my true heritage by now, thanks to Pineshade. I believe that IceClan was only trying to protect me, and I forgive them for all that occured," Ravensplash dipped her head to Pebblestar, who sat with his Clanmates at the roots of the Black Elm.

She faced her Clan once again, this time meeting the eyes of each cat in turn. "I may have been born in IceClan, but I am a *LeafClan* cat. This is my home, if you'll have me."

There was a drawn out moment of silence as the LeafClan warriors exchanged thoughtful glances. Duskowl was the first to speak. He met her gaze with warm eyes from the other side of the Black Elm.

"Of course we'll have you."

Instantly, mews of approval rang throughout the clearing. Cats stood on the hind legs, calling out with joy, and the camp surged with movement and celebration. Ravensplash beamed down at her family and relished in their acceptance of her. This was where she belonged. She was sure of it.

But then, the celebratory meows died down as a flame-pelted warrior stepped forward. She was the spitting image of Hawkstar, and her orange eyes were ripe with uncertainty.

Embermist.

"With all due respect, Ravensplash," Embermist meowed carefully, "What happens now?" she glanced between Ravensplash and Duskowl with narrowed eyes, "According to the warrior code, there's one thing that determines our next leader."

Ravensplash swallowed.

"The fight to the death."

a.n . //
whew! that was exhausting to write. i'm so tired right now ahahaha. anyway, please leave a vote, a comment, and share this story! get it out there! also, if ya haven't, check out the official character guide. it's one of my published works. thank youuuu :D

» eighteen

[image]

The air that morning was warm. Not in the good way, but instead, in the sickening, smothering way. Everything buzzed with the sounds of life, but the air was stagnant and it tasted like everything wrong with the world. There was no wind. Not even the slightest hint of a breeze. Butterflies flapped lazily about the clearing, searching for someplace to shelter themselves from the unrelenting heat. Cats lay flopped over in every corner of the camp, their soft, plump bellies rising and falling and their sides burning against the hot sand.

There were no clouds. The sun floated high above the cats' heads, taunting them. "Try and find some shade," it said, "I dare you." And then it would laugh as it continued to float there, its rays beating down with unbearable intensity.

Not even the dens could offer relief. They all stunk with the smell of smoking flesh and rotton fresh-kill. Black flies swarmed the pile of stinking prey, feasting upon every last bit of skin and muscle that clung to the small bones.

Ravensplash sauntered out of the medicine cat's den, thanking Oakflame as she passed him. The orange tom had seemed much happier ever since the day of the battle, when his brother had passed. Ravensplash supposed it was because of the way Hawkstar had always treated him. The rash leader had never respected Oakflame because of his choice to take on the role of healing rather than fighting. Just the memory of the time Hawkstar had nearly bitten Oakflame made Ravensplash shudder.

She scanned the camp. It was relatively tidy; IceClan had helped to clean up after the battle before they left. All of the bodies had been buried and the dens restored to their proper state. The Clan had sat vigil for Hawkstar and Pineshade, but she'd refused to participate. *Good riddance.*

After Embermist's mention of the traditional battle between

deputies, Ravensplash had done well to make sure all of her wounds were fully treated. Duskowl as well, had been making frequent trips to see Oakflame and Alderpaw.

And, at last, today was the day.

Ravensplash remembered a time when she would've gladly ripped Duskowl's insides out without a second thought. But today, something was different. She wasn't exactly sure when the change had occured, but as she stared across the clearing at the dark brown tabby, she realized suddenly that she no longer hated him.

His solid russet eyes were narrowed in focus as he listened to Berrythorn, who sat across from him. Ravensplash watched as the two cats nodded silently in agreement, and then began sharing tongues. Duskowl's tongue rasped one of the tortoiseshell's ears and they continued to chat.

When did he become so compassionate?

Ravensplash supposed that maybe she wasn't the only one who had changed these past couple of moons. Perhaps everyone else had grown, too.

Her thoughts were interrupted as a soft pelt brushed up against her own. Ravensplash turned, but by the scent she already knew it was Nettlesand.

The small ginger tom was looking at her with serious blue eyes, "Don't do this," he pleaded.

Her heart was racing. She bowed her head and let waves of heat embrace her body. "I-I think I have to."

Another cat appeared beside Nettlesand. His fur contrasted the young tom's, as it was jet black as the night. *Fallenmoon.*

"You don't have to do anything," her brother promised, his neck fur bristling in fear, "This is wrong! You know that." His voice fell to a whisper.

Ravensplash couldn't think straight as she shouldered past

them. The sun seemed to seep into her fur and crawl under her skin. She panted desperately as she continued to stalk forward until she'd reached the very center of the clearing. Her heart quickened another five beats. Then ten. And then it was pounding so fast she feared it would leap right out of her chest.

Duskowl stood up and took several paces towards her. The Clan had gathered to watch, and every cat seemed to be holding their breath as they looked on from the sidelines.

The enormous brown deputy planted his forepaws firmly into the dusty ground. He tossed his head and bared his teeth into a snarl.

A challenge.

Ravensplash shot forward with frightening speed and barreled the huge tom into the grass. They grappled viciously on the ground, a hissing mess of torn fur and claws. Ravensplash rolled Duskowl onto his back and pummled his face with her forepaws. Then she sunk her recently sharpened claws into his neck, leaning on him with all her weight to hopefully keep him at bay.

But she'd overcommitted and let Duskowl's bottom half go unconstrained. The dark tabby kicked up his hind legs with extreme force, sending Ravensplash flying into the air. She whooshed straight over his head, then tucked her head into her body and rolled into a smooth landing, ending on her paws. She resteadied herself and whirled back around to face her opponent.

Close call.

Duskowl had regained his footing and now stood several fox lengths away, his sharp eyes flickering with an odd light as he looked at her. She tried to read the emotion behind his gaze, but his feelings were guarded.

They circled one another, and a low whooping grew into cheering from the cats that surrounded them.

"Kill her!" One voice shouted.

Seemingly egged on, Duskowl lunged with his claws outstretched. But Ravensplash had seen the move before he'd even begun. She rolled underneath him, slashing with her claws as she passed and raking his underbelly. The tom howled in pain and skidded to a halt when he landed.

He whirled on her in a hasty counter-attack, faking to one side but coming from the other with gaping jaws. Duskowl then bite down hard on her shoulder before Ravensplash could react, latching on with startling might. She shook her body desperately, ramming the tom into the solid earth when he refused to let go. But he clenched down harder and deadly fangs sunk further into the hard muscle of her shoulder. Then he fell away, ripping skin as he went. Ravensplash screeched in agony and felt rage bubble in her gut.

She limped at him, targeting his already injured belly. Duskowl was caught off guard and carelessly fell back a few steps, unskillfully exposing his weak flank.

Aware of the opportunity, Ravensplash took two large strides towards the massive tom and grabbed his left foreleg in her jaws. She yanked down, hard, and his enormous body crashed down. Then, she mounted his back and delivered ruthless scratches to each shoulder.

She felt blind. Blood roared in her ears and all she could see was the prospect of victory.

Nothing else mattered.

She rolled with the tom until she was on top and he lay, flabbergasted, on bottom. She leaned in towards his muzzle, hissing with fury. And all at once the determination that once flared in his eyes dissipated to give way to fear.

Duskowl was afraid of *her*.

Ravensplash laughed madly at the insanity of it all. She could *kill* him. She *would* kill him.

Or...

Would she?

When she opened her eyes again and saw him beneath her, her bravery melted away.

Duskowl was crying. His eyes were shut tight, and he prayed to StarClan under his breath. His colossal body shook with fear, and suddenly he seemed so small.

Ravensplash felt pity budding inside her soul. She tried to push it away, but it had already gripped her stomach and nestled into her being.

She fell back, stepping off of the great tom. The clearing around her rung with stunned silence.

"I..."

Ravensplash swallowed, fighting tears.

"I can't kill a friend."

Duskowl was still on his back, but his eyes were now open and wide with shock. Slowly, ever so slowly, he pushed himself shakingly to his paws. The whole Clan turned to face the beaten deputy, all collectively wondering what he would do next.

The immense tabby pooled waterfalls of blood from each of his wounds. He gasped weakly, struggling to take in enough air. The heat of greenleaf day poured in from all sides as Ravensplash watched him.

Waiting for even a single word out of his mouth.

And so Duskowl shifted to look her right in the eyes. His fur was clumped and matted with flowing blood, its previously cocoa color now stained dark crimsion. By the look in his eyes as he stood there, it seemed to Ravensplash that he had a mountain of things to say.

But all he could manage was, "Thank you."

a.n. //
yes, ravensplash is a little mental. seriously, she's actually insane. like, i purposefully wrote her to be that way. anyway, please vote if you enjoyed and leave me a comment about what you thought of this weird chapter. just two more left!

» nineteen

[image]

Her paws were powerful and steady as she stalked to the base of the Black Elm. Its dark winding branches extended towards the clear blue sky above her, and Ravensplash's tail twitched in excited anticipation.

At last, she was here.

She felt her heart swell with pride as she made a gigantic leap into the branches of the Black Elm. *This is what I've been waiting for my entire life. This is the moment I've dreamed of since I was just a tiny kit in the nursery. At last, I am LeafClan's*

supreme

ruler.

No cat can stop me now.

Ravensplash sprung from limb to limb until she stood on the sturdy brown branch that was meant for the leader of the Clan. She tipped her chin into the hot greenleaf air, breathing in the scent of flowers and springy weeds. "All cats old enough to climb the trees of their forest, join here beneath the Black Elm."

Down below, the Clan began to recover from their shock and move into formation beneath the Black Elm. They gave Duskowl's heaving, stained body a wide berth as they settled in to listen. The disgraced tom lifted his head weakly as Oakflame and Alderpaw hurried over to begin treating his wounds.

"Cats of LeafClan. For moons our Clan has practiced the tradition of the fight to the death. For moons we have resorted to violence and killing in order to feel strong. But the strongest warriors are those that are willing to spare others and find the peace in the world. I propose a new way of life for our Clan; a life that is structered around compassion and honor rather than

bloodshed." Ravensplash had never felt more certain of anything in her life. She was here, and she was ready to make a change in this world of wrongdoing.

Nettlesand was the first to cry out in support. He lifted his small head into the air and yowled with approval. Soon, his voice was joined by others. Fallenmoon, Nightwater, then Berrythorn and Cindershadow. Energy surged from the mass of cats, and within seconds the entire Clan united with cries of agreement. Moons of abuse and hardship released into the air and floated away.

Ravensplash felt her spirit uplifted by her Clan's acceptance, and she raised her voice so that she was sure her warrior ancestors were listening. "This is the start of a new era for LeafClan! No longer will cats be shamed for how they don't belong, but they will be honored and cherished for their differences! Because *that* is what strength means! Long live LeafClan!"

"Long live LeafClan!"

» - - - «

"You did the right thing," Nettlesand purred, his blue eyes shining with happy light.

"Yes," Ravensplash agreed, bowing her head. She leaned down and washed her forepaws with her pink tongue, rasping it gently along her dark gray fur. "And I can't thank you enough, Nettlesand," she said when she'd finished, "You've made me a better cat and as a result a better Clanmate."

Playful amusement glinted in Nettlesand's eyes, "You were kind of a toad-brain." he teased.

Ravensplash rolled her eyes and used her tail to pat down the cobwebs that were plastered against her shoulder. Alderpaw had given them to her before disappearing back into the medicine cat's den to see to Duskowl. Apparently the tom's injuries were severe. Ravensplash sighed, guilt clawing at her belly.

"Ravensplash!"

Redwind trotted over, his pawsteps quick and light. "Some cats from IceClan are here to see you," he informed her, "Darkivy's with them."

Ravensplash's ears pricked with interest and she smiled, "Bring them over here."

The russet tom nodded and sauntered off.

Several minutes later he returned, followed by three IceClan cats. Ravensplash beamed when she recognized Darkivy, Cedarpatch and Gingerswan. "Leave us, Redwind," she ordered, shooing the tom away with her tail.

"W-we don't mean to intrude," Cedarpatch meowed nervously, "But Darkivy wanted to make sure your Clan was recovering well from the battle."

"It's okay, Cedarpatch," Ravensplash assured the fidgety tom, "You aren't intruding. And LeafClan's doing well. In fact, I plan to make the journey to the Cave of Moonlight several dawns from now."

Darkivy's gaze darkened with guarded sorrow, "Oh... so Duskowl's dead then, is it?"

"N-No!" Ravensplash exclaimed, "Actually, I've decided to abandon LeafClan's sick traditions and reform the Clan."

Gingerswan smiled softly, "That's fantastic news," he said, clearly pleased. His long cream and ginger tuffed fur blew in a warm greenleaf breeze. "Ravensplash, we can't believe how far you've come. Not too long ago, you were just a stubborn, overly ambitious deputy."

"I'm still a stubborn, overly ambitious deputy." Ravensplash puffed out her chest and pretended to look big.

Nettlesand broke in, "Ravensplash, what are you going to say to StarClan? Aren't you afraid they'll reject you as a leader for denouncing their warrior code?"

Ravensplash took a deep breath, "I guess I'm just hoping for the

best," she admitted, "It's in their paws. I can't control how they react."

All four cats looked at her with worried stares.

"I'll be fine!" she mewed unconvincingly. "At least I won't be alone."

Nettlesand started, "What do you mean?"

"Duskowl's coming with me."

» - - - «

Ravensplash pushed her way past the moss and lichen that draped over the entrance of the medicine cat's den. Inside was cool and flooded with moonlight. Colorful herbs lined the shelves built within the den walls, and a pool of fresh blue water rippled and filtered with the movement of the night. She pattered silently through the den, careful not to wake Oakflame and Alderpaw, who lay without stirring in their nests. Towards the back was Duskowl, reduced by the battle to just a lump of sticky fur.

His sides moved up and down rapidly, and his breath was coarse. Ravensplash felt pity strike her gut as she marveled at how weak the tom had become. A cold, frightening thought shot through her mind.

Is he going to die?

Shuddering, Ravensplash felt the sudden urge to wake him up quickly. *Before something very, very bad happens.*

"Duskowl?" Ravensplash whispered into the darkness, reaching out and touching his side lightly.

But he had not been asleep. Immediately Duskowl rolled over and looked at her with piercing gray eyes, lit with the reflection of the moon.

Part of Ravensplash wanted to recoil and run away. But she held her ground and dipped her head in respect. "Duskowl, I've come to talk to you."

"In the middle of the night?" Behind the exhaustion in his voice there was a trace of familiar judgement and impatience. He shifted in his moss, wincing with the effort.

"Er... yeah."

"Mousebrain," he muttered.

"Hey, fish-face, I'm trying to talk to you!" Ravensplash felt her fur begin to bristle as she raised her hackles and narrowed her sharp amber eyes to slits. Duskowl stared back at her with a satisfied expression.

"There's the Ravensplash I remember."

Duskowl laughed at his own joke, but his laughter devolved into hacking and violent coughs. Blood sputtered out of his mouth, and Ravensplash softened her stance. Then his fit ended, and he nestled his head back into his nest.

"Anyway," Ravensplash sighed, "I've come to ask you for a favor."

Although his head remained down, Ravensplash could see that Duskowl's ears had perked and he was listening carefully.

"I admire you more than any other cat I know," Ravensplash began, staring down hard at her paws, "And... I think I need you. I think we help eachother," she glanced up to see his reaction, but he was still laying there motionless with a blank face, "So... what I'm saying is... I want to lead with you. The two of us, side by side."

Suddenly, Duskowl jerked his head back up and he looked at her, bewildered, "Ravensplash, are you suggesting that LeafClan have two leaders?"

Ravensplash could feel excitement pulsing from his matted pelt. She grinned at him, "Precisely."

a.n. //
sorry, i'm tired and sick so this is unedited and may be awful or filled with grammatical errors or both but... ¯_(ツ)_/¯

please vote, comment, and share!

» twenty

[image]

The path was well traveled. The yellow, straw-like grass of BreezeClan territory was matted into the earthy soil beneath, smashed down by the paws of previous journeys. The sky was beginning to darken, and heavy charcoal clouds full of thunder rolled in from up ahead. A frightening boom sounded, echoing across the plains as a gust of harsh wind blew Ravensplash's fur back. She squinted into the current, her eyes beginning to water.

"Maybe we should turn back!" Duskowl yowled over the howling blast.

Ravensplash turned to glance behind her, her paws planted firmly on the ground to hold her body steady. "No!" she shouted in return, "We've come this far!"

The slate gray deputy turned again and continued forward, focusing hard on every pawstep. Another gale of wind blew her backwards, and Ravensplash cried out in surprise.

"Ravensplash," Duskowl sounded desperate, "There's a storm coming in. If we don't go back now, we're going to die out here!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Ravensplash snapped, whirling on the tabby tom. "We're not turning back, Duskowl. We're halfway there."

The broad-shouldered deputy huffed reluctantly, then sprinted to catch up to her. "Fine," he growled, "But you sure chose the wrong day to make this journey."

"I could still kill you, you know." Ravensplash warned, only a very small edge of humor in her tone.

Duskowl gave a tiny snort of unamused laughter, but fell quiet anyway.

Disaster loomed on the ridge of the clouds. There was no stop to them. They continued to move in, one after another, all joining to form a huge, swirling mass of darkness. Another clap of thunder pounded across the meadow, vibrating every bone in Ravensplash's body. Beside her, Duskowl tensed.

Together, they endured one awful moment of silence before a wave of rain came sweeping in, washing right through Ravensplash and Duskowl's fur, straight to their skin. Ravensplash shivered, already chilled. Within seconds, the entire sky before them was dark with thunderclouds and jagged bolts of lightning came down from above. Blinded by the purple flashes, Ravensplash cried out in sudden fear.

"Go!" Duskowl roared, charging ahead.

Ravensplash scampered after him, her paws scrabbling to grip the now soggy earth. She could feel her lungs screaming with protest as she hastened her pace and went flying across BreezeClan territory. The ground shook with thunder, and Duskowl's image was beginning to fade into the sheet of murky rain. "Duskowl!" she screamed, petrified of losing him to the rain and being all alone to face it. "Duskowl, don't *leave* me here!"

His shape reappeared as she caught up, only to then find that he had slipped into a muddy puddle that had gathered at the bottom of a soaked ditch. Bits of grass floated in the water. Ravensplash clambered into the hole to retrieve Duskowl, holding him by the scruff of his neck and helping to heave his enormous weight out of the trench. He grunted, then flopped onto the ground above, his heaving sides plastered with mud.

"Come *on*! Get up!" Ravensplash ordered, gathering his head under her shoulder and pushing him upwards.

Duskowl growled with discontent as he recovered, now standing on all four legs. His eyes were narrowed, and his fur had collected twigs and clumps of dead grass. He looked as if he had given up when it was only the beginning.

The rain continued to hammer them relentlessly as they

stood there, only growing more intense as another echo of thunder revereberated across the fields. By now, every direction looked the same. There was no way to see through the rain; it had swallowed the world.

"What if..." Duskowl was staring at his paws with wide, afraid eyes. "What if StarClan doesn't want us to make it?" he lifted his head to look directly at Ravensplash.

"Don't say that--"

"What if they're through with us? What if we've disobeyed them and now they want us dead? What if *StarClan* sent the storm to kill us?"

"That's not what happened!" Ravensplash snarled, lashing her tail.

Duskowl quieted, his ears flattening.

"Look," Ravensplash whispered, "I know you're doubtful. And I know you're tired. Believe me, I am too. But we have to see this through. And all my life, Duskowl has *never* been one to give up."

When he didn't reply, Ravensplash went on, "Look at yourself! You're a whimpering, pathetic kit! I don't even *recognize* the cat before me. Because this cat is not the tom I asked to lead with me. Now... you can either stay here and die, or you can keep going."

Slowly, the haze in Duskowl's eyes dissipated. His breathing slowed, and Ravensplash could see his strength returning.

"That's what I thought." Ravensplash mewed approvingly, "Now, if StarClan really wants us dead, why don't we go defy them one more time?"

Together, they went. The rain slammed their pelts and their faces as they raced over hills and dodged puddles. Every strike of lightning, every clap of thunder brought them closer to their goal. And by the time the gaping mouth of the Cave of Moonlight opened up before them, their muscles ached with the effort and torment of

the long journey.

They did not stop until they stood safely underneath the rugged overhang that guarded the entrance to the cave. There, the rain seemed far away, their camp seemed forgotten. The only thing that existed was themselves and the darkness that lay ahead.

"Remember," Ravensplash said, turning to Duskowl, "They may not accept us. They may turn us away."

Duskowl's words shook, "I know."

Ravensplash nudged his shoulder encouragingly. "It'll be okay. Are you ready to do this?"

"...I think so."

They descended through the tunnels towards the cave.

It smelled like dirt.

Ravensplash imagined Hawkstar, walking the same path many moons ago to recieve his nine lives.

She imagined his excitement.

Perhaps, his ambition.

And she reminded herself of what needed to change in her Clan, and how this new leadership would better the forest as a whole.

She stumbled as she and Duskowl exited the tunnels and entered the round cave. It glowed with an odd silver hue, the walls painted with starlight. Milky white crystals hung from the ceiling and protruded from the floor. They sparkled and reflected the starlight all around the room.

"Wow..." Ravensplash gasped.

"It's so beautiful." Duskowl murmured, his voice bouncing off the walls.

The sound of stones being kicked up resonated throughout the small cave, and Duskowl and Ravensplash turned to see a mysterious cat padding towards them.

He had appeared out of thin air, and his paws were shrouded in creamy starlight. He lifted his head proudly and stared directly ahead at the two deputies.

"At last... you have arrived.

The deputies.

The deputies that we were told would come to guide us into a new light. The deputies meant to bring our Clans into a wonderful era of wisdom, honor, and compassion. Even after so many moons of waiting, the prophecy has finally come true.

Welcome."

The strange tom dipped his head in a sign of formal respect, and his rich voice faded.

Ravensplash stepped forward, "You knew we would come?"

"Yes," said the tom, his long tail twitching.

"But how?" Duskowl asked curiously, "And if you knew the Clans needed to take a new direction, why didn't you just do it yourself?"

"There was a prophecy," the tom explained, "One that told us there would be a change to the warrior code. And that two heros would bring this change to the four Clans. It was out of our paws. Some things, even StarClan cannot control."

Ravensplash could hardly contain her excitement, "So... you accept us as LeafClan's next leaders?"

The starlight tom purred warmly, "We do. You have come a long way, Ravensplash. Not only in terms of being a leader, but also in terms of your character. I do believe you have Nettlesand to thank for that."

Ravensplash shrugged bashfully, "He sets a great example."

"And you," added the tom as he turned to Duskowl, "You have come far as well. Duskowl, you were once a hot-headed and stubborn deputy. You were power-obsessed, you were impossible to compromise with. But I believe Ravensplash here has taught you to let some of that go. You have learned the capacity for love."

Duskowl looked embarassed, and Ravensplash could feel heat radiating off his pelt.

The StarClan warrior raised his head, suddenly serious. "This is a huge moment. For moons, the sick traditions that we created have been followed without question. But you two managed to raise some questions and spark some doubt. Authority should always be challenged, because our thoughts and ideals are forever evolving. Thank you."

As his words slowly began to disappear into the blackness of the cave, the mysterious tom turned and began padding gently away.

"Wait!" Ravensplash cried desperately.

He rounded and looked at her expectantly.

"Before you go... who are you?"

The tomcat smiled knowingly. Gradually, his starry figure began to dematerialize.

"My name is Leafstar."

a.n. //
wow, guys. it's here. i can't believe we made it! 'the deputies' has come to its conclusion. i know the ending here was a little open ended, but that's what i wanted. the rest is kind of up to you. i will confirm that duskowl and ravensplash become duskstar and ravenstar and go on to lead leafclan. the clans change for the better. it's the start of a new era!
thanks so much for sticking it out to the end. this is the second

story i've ever finished, which is obviously such a big accomplishment for me, because i usually abandon things too quickly. not to mention it's the first *warriors* fan-fic i've *ever* finished! that is huge. so, THANK YOU.
i'm sure this story will slowly become more and more cringe-worthy to me as i grow up and become a (hopefully) better writer. but i'm super proud of it! i loved all the characters. even the bad ones like hawkstar i enjoyed writing for. i just really felt like this was the first story that i got so attached to the characters, which i'm guessing is a good sign!
PLEASE let me know any and all thoughts. i love hearing what you guys have to say. until next time. ♡